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AUTHOR OF "THE BOOK OF PITY AND OF DEATH,"
"INTO MOROCCO," ETC.

TRANSLATED BY

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I

MARCHING in the procession of the *Fête-Dieu*, in company with three other children attired like himself, was a very small boy, dressed to represent an angel, videlicet, in a little cambric shirt and a pair of white dove's wings fastened on his shoulders. That was in the month of June, beneath the warm, bright southern sun, in remote Provence, where it touches Italy.

The other three angels were fair and trudged along with eyes downcast, manifestly taking themselves and the situation in general very seriously. But our friend, little Jean, brown as a berry and with a tangle of curls surmounting his pretty face, the handsomest and strongest of them all,

cast comical looks at the people kneeling along his path, not a whit impressed by the solemnity of the occasion, and evidently bent on having a good time. He had an appearance of vigor and perfect health, with regular features, a complexion like the sunny side of a ripe peach, and eyebrows that resembled two narrow ribbons of black velvet. The expression of his candid, laughing eyes was more infantile, more babyish, than accorded well with his age of six or seven years, and the orbs themselves, dilated wide between lashes of unusual length, were of a deep, limpid blue, surprising in that little Arab face.

His relatives—a widowed mother, who still wore mourning but had long since laid aside the long crape veil, and a kind old grandfather in black frock coat and white cravat—followed the procession at a distance, among the crowd, a happy smile upon their lips, proud to see their darling look so handsome and to hear his praises in the mouth of everyone.

Not blessed with superfluity of this world's goods were they, this mother and grandfather, possessing nothing save a little house in town and a small place in the country where there were a few orange trees and a field or two of roses ; connected by ties of kinship, too, through all this part of France, with people more wealthy than themselves, landowners and "perfumers," who were inclined a little to look down on them. The Bernys were a numerous and important family in that part of the world, whose strain had been untainted by admixture of foreign blood at least since the days of the Saracens, and their Provençal type had subsisted in all its purity. For two generations they had made part of the bourgeoisie of Antibes. Some old sea-dogs among their ancestors had sailed away in quest of pelf and glory, even as far as Ile de Bourbon and the Indies, and thus it was that nomadic instincts, transmitted by heredity and inspiring fear and alarm in the bosoms of

the mothers, sometimes manifested themselves among the young men and boys.

As slowly and religiously she followed the little brown angel with the white dove's wings, the widowed mother was reflecting on many matters, and even as she gazed on him and her soul was filled with delight and pride, her joy was marred by a melancholy preoccupation. O, why the impossibility of that sweet and childish dream—the dream that every mother fondly cherishes—of keeping him by her as she beheld him now, a little boy with limpid eyes and curly head ! O, why does the future swallow up the present thus remorselessly ! Soon there would be so many difficulties to be faced and conquered for the sake of this wayward and charming little creature, who, notwithstanding his baby eyes, was already beginning to assume mannish ways, who had troublesome freaks and fancies now and then, and would run away from home to play and roam the fields till nightfall, no one knew where.

To give him an education equal to his cousins, so much richer than he, what was she to do, how was she to manage? And if he should refuse to work after all their sacrifices, what would become of them? By this time she had ceased to smile, and was heedless alike of the white-robed maidens in the procession, the cheerful sunlight and the fleeting present; her mind was dwelling exclusively on this one thought, a little narrow, it may be, but so motherly and that had been her guiding star through life--how could she manage to make of her poor, penniless little Jean a man who should be at least the equal of the other boys of that proud Berny family.

II

A boy of ten or thereabout, with a manner that indicated a superabundant fund of energy and daring, already approaching young manhood, but with the same babyish expression and laughing limpidity in the handsome eyes with their enframement of black velvet, was walking slowly up and down the beach at Antibes, accompanied by three or four other urchins of his own age, one of whom, four years ago, had also figured as an angel in the procession of the *Fête-Dieu*.

Perceiving a felucca stranded on the flats, motionless and with a heavy list to port, the little choppy blue waves of the Mediterranean eddying and swirling around her, they hurried off with the resolute and knowing air of old sailors to lend a helping hand, while the fishermen, baring their

swarthy legs, leaped overboard to pull their vessel off.

It was a beautiful Easter Sunday. Jean was wearing man's attire that day for the first time, jacket and trousers, with a little brown felt hat set off by a velvet ribbon, which he wore very far back on his head, sailor fashion. Attired in the same pretty, brand new suit, he had attended high mass that morning with his mother; and now the time, longed for with such impatience, had come, when he could be off and amuse himself with his companions.

At evening, as was always the case, he came in late to dinner, after a day spent in roaming about the old port and climbing over the ships. His new clothes were in a sorry plight, notwithstanding the entreaties and admonitions his mother had given him that morning, and the little brown felt was cocked all of one side over his tangled curls and perspiring forehead. He was scolded a little, but very gently, as was the case always.

Because it was a *fête* day and they were to go out after dinner he did not change his fine new suit before sitting down at table. The fancy seizing him, he even asked permission to wear the pretty, broad-brimmed hat, than which life had nothing more dear to him. The old grandfather, who always took dinner with his daughter Sundays, was there, too, as ever wearing the black frock and white cravat that gave to his semi-poverty an aspect of respectability. And the twilight, the limpid, crepuscular light of springtime, shed its soft, rosy splendor upon the homely board that old Miette, the maid of all work, had spread for the family for many a long year.

For all his love of fun and sport, which was uppermost pretty constantly with him, Jean loved them both well, mamma and grandfather; in his impulsive, fitful little heart, that was too apt to forget what it should have remembered, they had a safe, warm corner, although it was sometimes hard to find. And now, at that very

moment, in spite of his inattention and absent-mindedness, in spite of the tantalizing desire he felt to be out under the open sky, a new picture of them was forming in his mind, overlying and obliterating the more ancient ones, a picture more lasting than those that had gone before, and that in the future would be cherished more fondly and regretted more keenly. So, too, were engraved more deeply on the tablet of his memory the unprepossessing features of poor, humble Miette, who had helped to rear him and rocked his cradle when he was a baby ; so, too, with every trivial detail about the house, so Provençal in appearance, arrangement and odors, where he first saw the light. There are certain moments in our life that seem to have in them nothing of special import, nothing more or less than the countless others of which we take no note, and which yet become to us as landmarks, milestones never to be forgotten amid the swift flight of hurrying years. Thus was it with that dinner hour at Eastertide

for that small creature, so mere a child, who doubtless had never until then known what it was to think with such intensity and unconscious profundity. And to that impression, which had suddenly stamped itself upon his mind in such vivid and unfading colors, of his mother's loving, anxious eyes, of the old grandfather's face, so full of gentle resignation, rising above the snow-white cravat, there came mingling with the others—for the *always* of humanity, that is to say, for all his lifetime—a host of secondary elements: his assumption of man's attire, presage of greater liberty and an adventurous life; the color of the new paper on the walls of the dining-room; some other inexpensive embellishments about the premises of which he was very proud; the delightful prospect of a week's vacation that lay before him; the impression of approaching summer, the charm of those early splendors of protracted twilight, of that period of the year when they were first permitted to dine in the

expiring transparency of daylight, without the lamp; and, finally, the multitude of inexpressible small things that, taken together, formed a tenderly melancholy background for that happy evening. The gallery of pictures that was formed there, deep in his memory, and so closely linked together that they could not be torn one from another, might have been fitly styled instantaneous photographs of an Easter Sunday.

And all the while she, the mother, was watching him with increasing anxiety, beholding him so absent and preoccupied, his thoughts so far away from home and her! For a long time she had been cherishing an idea, a fixed, fond plan, whereby she might keep this only son of hers in Provence and have him for a delight and prop to her declining years; an uncle, the only one of the rich Bernys who had ever condescended to notice his poor, handsome little nephew, was one of the perfumers of the neighborhood, or, in other words, he owned up on

the mountain a factory where the heaps and heaps of roses and geraniums that were gathered in the fields about were made to surrender by distillation their sweet odors; and he had promised to provide for Jean's future, and ultimately make the business over to him, if Jean, as he grew to manhood, showed himself obedient and industrious.

But on that pleasant Easter evening her melancholy and despair grew darker and deeper as she saw with what fixed intensity he gazed from out the open window upon the port, crowded with white-winged ships and swift feluccas darting here and there, and beyond the broad stretch of deep blue sea.

III

ON a bright, stiflingly hot afternoon late in June, in a class-room into which the sun, his daily course now almost ended, was pouring floods of light, a tall, handsome young fellow, of manly proportions, close-buttoned in his tightly fitting collegian's tunic, was indulging in a day-dream, all by himself, his eyes filled with idle speculation.

The classes had been dismissed, the town boys had gone to their homes, the others were diverting themselves in a remote play-ground. He, Jean, who was one of the few boarders in this Provençal college of Maristes, was enjoying this evening a brief respite from his labors in recognition of his name having appeared that day in the *Official Bulletin*: Jean Berny, candidate for the Naval School. And he had come to

this class-room that he might be alone, and reflect on the future of adventure that he beheld before him.

His mother, it is unnecessary to state, had abandoned all her cherished plans; since it was his wish, she had consented that he should adopt that seafaring life which she held in such dread and horror, and, once the matter settled, that he might pass successfully, had condemned herself to a life of severe and unintermitting privation.

A candidate for the *Borda*! And yet he had been an idler and a drone, had wasted his time and perpetrated every description of boyish prank from beginning to end of his schooldays, while there at home the mamma and grandfather, and old Miette, too, in her humble way, were pinching themselves to pay his bills for board and instruction.

But now that there was a chance of his passing, he had said to himself that he would turn to the best account he knew

how the two months that were left to him before the dreaded final oral examination, but he would grant himself a holiday for this evening and the morrow, just to reflect on matters a bit.

He had begun by setting down on the first page of his exercise books, opposite his name, the glorious and ever to be remembered day of the week, month and year. And now he was thinking of far distant lands, whose shores were washed by strange and unknown seas.

About him on every side the repose of the dying day was descending on the old Marist college; the empty rooms, the deserted corridors were filled with the sonorous silence of the summer evening; streaming through the wide-open windows the golden light of the declining sun penetrated everywhere, illuminating dark corners, casting a warm splendor on the bare walls, roughly smeared with yellow ochre, and in the blue sky above clouds of dusky swallows were wheeling, advancing, and receding, drunk

with light and motion, and at every turn in their swift flight hurling against the silent college their shrill, strident cry.

And deep down in the recesses of Jean's memory a picture was forming of this summer evening and all these attending circumstances—as formerly of the dinner at Eastertide—another landmark, another headland in the ocean of life, but this time with more of the mysterious and foreign in it, with more of vague, unexplained melancholy in the environment.

Until the hour when the first bats came fitting forth in silence from beneath the hot timbers of the old roof did he remain there, tranquil and solitary, dreamily reflecting on the future and on the career that was so near as almost to be within his grasp. And the splendor of the atmosphere spoke to him of yellow sands and glaring sunlight, of cities of the Orient, of strands that man's foot had never pressed, and, vaguely, too, of love.

IV

IT is two months later at Antibes, about the middle of vacation.

The time was at hand when the list of appointments to the Naval School would be made public. An atmosphere of poignant expectation pervaded the little house, on which the hot Provençal sun beat fiercely, whither day after day, as soon as the *Official* was received, came the grandfather to say there was no news. Through some of the wealthy Bernys who had grudgingly consented to lend their influence, letters of recommendation to the examiners had been secured from some men of note—and Jean's mother was hopeful. It was, in a measure, a question of life and death with him, however, for he would soon be seventeen, and should he be rejected, admission to the

Borda would evermore be inexorably denied him.

As for him, the lack of interest he displayed was incomprehensible. Some new notion, which alarmed and distressed his relatives, seemed to have germinated in that comely head of his, so thoughtless and yet so stubborn, so difficult to guide aright, for such utter unconcern was not to be accounted for, even on the ground of his extreme boyishness. It really seemed as if a sailor's life had ceased to have attractions for him. But they both hung back and refrained from questioning him, fearing to know the worst.

He, however, now a young man grown, boasting a silky mustache and wearing a handsome English suit in place of the discarded schoolboy's tunic, was almost constantly away from home, and lingered, love-making among the pretty girls, until the night was far advanced.

And yet it was the self-same, frank, limpid eyes, gray-blue in color, looking out from be-

tween intensely black, curved lashes, the eyes of the little angel of the *Fête-Dieu*, that illuminated his face, now radiant with the pride of manhood. And no one looking in those eyes, so childishly irresponsible, but at the same time so tender and so kindly, could find it in his heart to chide him or say an ungentle word to him.

And his eyes did not belie him ; he was as affectionate and tender-hearted as their expression denoted him to be, was this rattle-pated Jean. For his mother and grandfather, to whom he had been an almost constant source of anxiety, his love amounted to adoration. If he was captious and fretful with them at times, as was often the case, the reason was that in his eyes they still personified authority, against which his untrained nature incessantly rebelled. The better side of his disposition he displayed to the poor and lowly, to old Miette now and then, to little beggar boys, to feeble old paupers, to suffering animals ; and the house was always pervaded by

three or four ugly, half-starved cats, that it was comical to see him bring in tenderly in his arms, after having saved them from their appointed death by drowning.

One day the old grandfather, trim and respectable as ever in his well-brushed black frock, which, in order that his grandson might have the benefit of another tutor was doing its second year's service, came in later than usual, with a step more feeble and tottering than was his wont. Miette, who had been watching at the kitchen window for his coming, alarmed to see him with a newspaper in his hand, hastily pulled to the shutters as if to retard the dreaded moment when the truth must be known, seated herself, her heart beating violently, and waited.

He entered, and when he had climbed the stairs to the little first floor drawing-room, called in a voice that was strangely unlike his own :

“Henriette, my daughter, quick, come here!”

She came hurrying to him, panting breathlessly.

“What is it? He has been rejected, hasn’t he?”

“Well, yes—yes, my daughter. At least we shall have to think so, for here is the *Official*, and his name does not appear in it.”

“O my Lord, my God!” was all the poor mother said, wringing her hands, in a faint, broken-hearted voice. And they sat there, the old man and she, in silence, pressing closely to each other’s side, stricken dumb by the wreck of all their earthly hopes. There was nothing left for them to say; during those days of waiting and suspense they had exhausted the subject in their anxious colloquies, had looked this irremediable disaster in the face and examined it in all its consequences. What would he do, that Jean to whom they had not found courage to speak their mind, what effort would he consent to make? To maintain him at school on an equality with his companions, to preserve to the little house and

to its inmates an outward show of respectability, they had been reduced to the necessity of becoming borrowers and had mortgaged the country property, the orange trees and fields of roses that had been handed down from father to son for generations. And now that the end for which they had sacrificed their all was no longer, and would never be, capable of attainment, they could not see their way before them ; no, in their lack of means to provide another career for their son, they could not see their way at all. Their life was shattered, their small world seemed to them to be drawing to an end. Forebodings of disaster, inevitable and irretrievable, floated before their mental vision, and, without well knowing why, they looked upon their Jean as one for whom there was no longer hope in life. And as they continued to sit there in mournful silence, it seemed to them that over their poor home that they had loved so well, that they had sacrificed so much to save, there passed a chill wind, breath-

ing menace of dispersion and piecemeal ruin.

And now to them came *he*, with the light step of the thoughtless idler, in his button-hole a red rose that a pretty girl who loved him had placed there.

“O Monsieur Jean !” said Miette, standing in the corridor, “come in, come in, quick. Go up and see your poor mother and the grandfather, who are above, awaiting you.”

“How? What is the matter?” he said off-handedly, assuming his manly air of unconcern. The distress on Miette’s face had told him all.

He entered the unpretentious little drawing-room, where, as the maid had said, they were awaiting him, and toward which, exchanging no word, they had heard him coming up the stair. He came forward with the embarrassed air and bearing of a schoolboy detected in some trivial peccadillo, with partly averted face, and in his

soft, velvety eyes there was something, an imperceptible smile, approaching bravado.

Of their deep distress he saw nothing. For his own part, he was neither surprised nor disappointed, for he had long since ceased to hope, knowing as he did, better than anyone else, how he had frittered away his time up to the very last minute, and at the oral examination had cut a sorry figure. There had been five or six boys of his stamp at the Marist college, who, looking forward to the possibility of a failure, had mutually pledged themselves to take service in the merchant marine. The blue shirt had no terrors for those lads; on the contrary, it had an attraction and a charm for them, as is the case with many a man who follows the sea solely for the pleasure he derives from sporting its distinctive costume. And during the month of inactivity that the vacation afforded him he had had time to perfect his plans for the future, which had much common sense to commend them, and to accustom himself in thought to his new and

laborious life. He would commence at the foot of the ladder, as a common, plain sailor-boy, and work his way up ; in this way he would be obeying the bidding of his maritime instincts, and, it might be, would see more of the world and encounter more thrilling adventures than in the navy. .

“ Pooh ! ” he exclaimed, without looking at the sheet which his grandfather’s trembling hand held out to him ; “ what do I care for their old *Borda*, since I shall be a sailor all the same ! ”

A sailor all the same. A common seaman, then, the career in all the world his mother most disliked and dreaded ! He announced his determination with the calmness of unalterable resolution—and therein lay the secret of his tranquil unconcern, that she had not until then succeeded in divining. Falling on them in the midst of their gloomy silence, this boyish utterance was the *résumé* and explanation of the somber, mysterious things that had been

hanging in the air, the forebodings of ruin, misery and death.

He looked them in the face, now, a thing he had not dared to do when he first came in. He looked at them with an air that was firm and decided still, but was very gentle, and grew gentler and gentler yet, with an expression of melancholy on his face that became more and more strongly marked. A sudden light had flashed in on his unreflective, happy-go-lucky mind ; all the sacrifices that had been so carefully kept hid from him, all the pinching and mute privation, he now divined for the first time ; his love for them was swollen by a sentiment that was new to him, one of profound and tender compassion ; and as he remarked the shiny spots that constant wear had left on his grandfather's carefully preserved coat, he felt himself melted and subdued as by a supreme prayer. Had his mother but asked him then he would have renounced all his youthful dreams of adventure ; would have consented to all they

could have desired, embracing them the while, and weeping hot tears.

But she did not read him rightly; hurt in her maternal pride, misjudging him and his intentions, wounded and grieved in every fiber of her being, she spoke to him in accents of severity, at that crucial moment when his heart was overflowing with tender sympathy for her. Then he hardened himself in turn; the eyes of the little angel of the *Fête-Dieu*, which had reappeared but now in all their soft limpidity, became set and dry, and he left the room, his determination now fixed beyond recall, immutably.

As he passed through the hall downstairs, beholding old Miette weeping in an agony of apprehension: "Cheer up! Miette mine," he cried, "don't grieve. This is not the end of the business, don't you see. There are plenty of other ways to be a sailor."

"How is that, Monsieur Jean?" she asked, lending an attentive and credulous ear. "I thought it was all ended."

Then he entered the neat kitchen and sat down to tell her what he had planned. Dissatisfied with himself at heart and oppressed by a sensation of melancholy that, until then, he had been a stranger to, lacking courage to go abroad and unable to endure the thought of facing those in the room above, he lingered long at her side. "When I shall have served my time before the mast, you see," he told her, "I will ship with captains who make the long voyage; in that way I shall more quickly get a ship of my own. I am just as well pleased, I assure you, that matters have turned out the way they have——" and seeing that she was looking at him and smiling through her tears, he took her in his arms and kissed her, lowly as she was, poor old Miette.

V

OCTOBER was drawing to an end in a glory of tranquil sunshine.

The light that fell day by day on the Berny residence was clear and bright as ever, the heavens above were immutably blue, but the little house was dark and cheerless since the day that the great disappointment had come within its door.

A rough sailor's kit—shirts of coarse linen, trousers and pea-jackets of stout, serviceable cloth, which the women spoke of in a whisper, with bated breath, and showed to no one—was being made ready, with Miette's assistance, in the little dining-room whose windows looked out upon the sea.

The other Bernys, the rich uncles and cousins, had been informed by Jean's grand-

father, with an ill-feigned air of nonchalance, of the decision that had been arrived at : “ Yes, we are going to let him serve aboard a trading vessel for a while, so that he may finish his apprenticeship as soon as possible, since his mind is bent on sailing in a deep-water ship and seeing something of the world. Perhaps our dear boy will change his mind when he has had some experience of the life ; in that case, we shall be only too happy to direct him toward another career. But, for the time being, his inclination in that direction seems to be so strong that his mother and I thought it our duty not to thwart it.” And then those other Bernys, more insolently patronizing than ever, and placing little confidence in the future of the officer who has to work for his living, wanted to know the name of the ship in which he was to sail.

Oh, as for that, she was a very unassuming little craft, hailing from the port of Antibes—the most convenient arrangement they had been able to make to enable him

to come home to them once in a while—a small brig that was loading up for the islands of the Levant with terra cotta jars made at Vallauris.

In addition to his other mental suffering the poor old man was cruelly afflicted in his pride. For some twenty years now his daughter Henriette, by reason of her slender fortune, had been unable to secure complete recognition from that Berny family of which she had become one by marriage. From the time she was made a widow and thrown on her own resources, he had been uncomplainingly enduring a constant martyrdom of concealed privation for her sake, to the end that she might preserve appearances, not discharge Miette, not sell her house, and, above all, pay for Jean's education at the Marist College in Grasse. And now that grandson, that Jean whom he adored in spite of all and perhaps more tenderly than ever, as the end of his life of sacrifice was drawing near, was causing him this supreme humiliation, was

going to be a common seaman before the mast, a sailor-boy on board a "trader," as the son of the meanest laborer or fisherman of the port might have done. What availed it to keep up the vain struggle, the hand-to-mouth existence from day to day, what availed anything.—Now that he had fulfilled the duty that respect for observances imposed on him and had communicated to the various members of the Berny family the decision that had been reached, it appeared to him that his usefulness in life had departed and that he no longer had any object to live for; he would have wished to remain at home, in his own bare, cheerless apartment, where the furniture was dim and faded with age, and there lie down and await the end.

But it was Sunday evening, the day traditionally devoted to dining with his daughter; he roused up a bit at the thought, and said to himself that he would dress and make ready to go—the more that this Sunday would be the last before Jean's departure.

He felt old, broken-down and weary as he had never felt before. And when, before going out upon the street where his acquaintance saluted him more cavalierly than in the past, he began from force of habit to brush the poor old black frock that had done him such long and faithful service, a fit of discouragement came over him, for that as for all the rest ; in the sentiment of his only grandson's disgrace his appearance, to which he had always devoted such jealous care in the midst of want and privation, his appearance, to-day, seemed to him a matter of little moment. And tears rose to his dim, lusterless eyes —those old man's tears that are more bitter than others, and flow unwillingly from their exhausted spring.

Jean, for his part, let the days go by in loitering aimlessly and building castles in the air, with a vague melancholy, now for the first time noticeable there, in his eyes that had at times a look of vacancy and in

his gentler manner. He remained at home much more than he had been used to do, and the port ceased to have attractions now that he had the certain assurance of soon being one of those who go down to the sea in ships. He hung about the house, casting lingering looks on the old familiar spots and thinking. Or he would betake himself, alone and solitary, to the old ancestral country place and shut himself in the untended garden, where chrysanthemums and autumnal asters overran the walks, and there spend hours communing with his thoughts, while lizards sported on the gray wall and golden oranges hung from the trees in the October sunlight. His boyhood was ending with the summer; with the glory of that sun, already declining to the south and presaging the approach of winter's melancholy days, would pass away his happy, careless youth; he felt this keenly, with an impression of terror and regret never experienced before.

While thus awaiting the time of his de-

parture his mind did not pursue a fixed, consecutive train of thought, but gave itself up more and more to vague fancies and dreams of distant lands. He read much, also, during the long idleness that was so rapidly drawing to an end, and his choice of books—or rather of disconnected passages of books—that, disdainfully putting aside all others, he selected for the charm they exercised on his imagination, indicated, as did his long eyes and pure profile, diffused transmitted Oriental tendencies. He was a compound of irreclaimable boyishness, physical exuberance, rude simplicity—and unconscious, unfathomable poetry. In the course of his miscellaneous reading he had come across, with the impression that they were not new to him, some of those visionary rhapsodies on the dead Orient that have become classic splendors, and he read them over and over in the silence of the sunlit garden, thrilling, each time he did so, with the sentiment of mystery that they evoked.

It was an evening of the long-gone ages. The golden domes of Benares, at news of the death of the Star Souryâ, phœnix of the world, wept tears of precious stones—

Words had a strange faculty of soothing and charming him. Simple allocutions like “once upon a time” or “it came to pass that in the days of—” that constitute such an important portion of the story-teller’s mental equipment, would produce in him a melancholy intoxication, like the faint perfume of a sarcophagus.

Egypt, Egypt ! the dung of birds defiles the shoulders of thy great unchanging gods, and the wind of the desert bears on its wings the ashes of thy dead—

And so, in that patrimonial domain, under the oranges that the fading sunlight touched with gold, among the chrysanthemums and purple asters and all the rank, uncared-for growths that chill autumn had breathed on with its withering breath, he thought of

those seaports of the Levantine islands on which he was soon to set his eyes, and of Egypt and its deserts of yellow sand, and of millennial India.

VI

THEIR last Sunday evening dinner was eaten in silence ; it consisted of the same traditional dishes, served, according to immemorial usage, by old Miette, who said not a word, for her heart, too, was heavy, and tears were ready to fall.

All through the repast Jean was beset by the haunting memory of a certain Easter dinner that had formed a sort of epoch in his boyhood's life, and, when looked back on afterward across the intervening years, appeared to him surrounded by a mysterious aureole of glory. There were the little brown felt hat and the newly assumed man's attire ; the softly transparent light and all the signs of early spring, seen through the open window ; from all things there exhaled an impression of freshness,

of newness, of the cool, rosy dawn of opening life. Now, on the other hand, there was an undefined presentiment, inexpressibly sad, of swiftly approaching end and darkness coming down, joined to the physical sensation of winter caused by the increasing cold and the earlier shutting in of night.

When he had finished his dessert of grapes, and rose to go for his customary evening walk about the town, spiritlessly, however, and as if against his will, his grandfather said to him: "Remain, my child, if you please; we have something we wish to say to you."

A darkling look rose swiftly to his face; he remained standing, with head lowered, ready with his defense, fearing there was to be an attempt to make him renounce the sailor's calling, a final attack of argument and entreaty—with a design, perhaps, to induce him to enter the service of his uncle, the perfumer.

But the grandfather went on in a slow,

sad voice of resignation, speaking of things he had not thought to hear, and that fell, one by one, heavy as drops of lead, upon his heart:

“My child, you are approaching man’s estate, and I have thought it fitting that I should render my account, in order that you may know that from this time you have no one to depend on but yourself.

“My child—your mother and I have nothing, almost nothing left.

“We thought it our duty to keep you at college with the Marists, and to that end borrowed considerable sums of money—which are unfortunately secured by a mortgage on our old country place of Carigou. As long as I live and draw my pension, the amount of which is known to you, we shall be able, perhaps—thanks to the untiring economy of your mother and this good girl—we shall be able, perhaps, to keep our dear house—to which you are as deeply attached as we. But after that, what then?” His voice, which broke con-

tinually, had in it the feeble quaver of great age, which Jean had never remarked before and which it gave him inexpressible pain to hear. And when he had concluded his final sentence: "God grant, my son, God in his mercy grant that I may live to see the day when you shall be able to earn your living—and your mother's. For the thought of seeing her compelled to work hurts me, you see, hurts me horribly—" when he had concluded, convulsive movements agitated his shoulders beneath the thin-worn cloth of his poor shabby Sunday coat, and his eyes, that had beheld the light for eighty years, twitched with distress in a way that was most pitiful.

He had already suspected something of the poor old grandfather's sacrifices and self-humiliation, had divined the increasing penury at home, where nevertheless such decent order was maintained. But that, no. It was too much; it exceeded the limits of all he had ever considered possible; to be destitute of everything, the old

place and the town house sold to strangers —and his mother working to gain her daily bread !

Gradually, while his aged relative continued to talk on in his feeble, trembling voice, these bitter truths impressed themselves upon his mind, so often empty and thoughtless, and fixed themselves there indelibly as if seared on it with a red-hot iron. Then he threw himself upon their bosoms, weeping hot tears, as children weep, possessed by an overmastering yearning to embrace and console those dear ones—and also to ask them for protection, for their protection and their counsel in the presence of disaster.

But his mother shed no tear ; she held him clasped to her bosom, forgetful of all beside for the time being, and desiring nothing save that she might be allowed to hold him thus. The misapprehension, the icy barrier that for the last two months had kept than asunder, had ceased to exist, and all the rest was as nothing in

comparison with this unspeakable delight of finding her boy once more, and forgiving, and knowing she still had his love.

Besides, more plebeian than her father, doubtless by reason of tendencies inherited from some forgotten progenitor who lived in times long-past, she felt herself now the braver, the calmer and more resolute of the two, when brought face to face with the probability of ruin ; if it became necessary to work, why, then she would work ; she would leave the country, that was all there was about it, and follow her Jean wherever his duty might call him ; sailor or officer, it was all the same ; he would still be her Jean, her stay, her prop, her life and only joy, and when she held him pressed to her bosom the world had nothing to offer her that she desired.

VII

AFTER the conversation of that evening a more cheerful feeling and somewhat of hope prevailed in the little house. After all, regard being had to the impossibility of persuading him to take up other studies, his plan for the future was about as good as any that could be devised, and the years before the mast would slip away and quickly be forgotten.

His calculation was: In two years I shall be an able seaman, and three years after that I can apply for a certificate empowering me to command a merchantman; in five years I shall be earning a good living and in a position to assist mother and grandfather; we shall all be happy once more and the dark days will be forgotten. He formed many good resolutions for his future guidance, he would work hard and

be very prudent, and his thoughtless gayety came back to him, his boyishness and jovial laugh.

He never left the house, however, except in their company. On those evenings, the last they were to be together, the three of them would go out to take the air, decently dressed in their best attire, as if by their appearance to assert their dignity in the eyes of those whom they encountered ; the old grandfather, carrying himself very erect, neat as a pin with his carefully brushed coat and immaculate neck cloth, Jean in his handsome English suit that he was soon to wear no more, faultlessly gloved and having his mother on his arm, the picture of a methodical, staid young man.

VIII

AMONG the mists and fogs of early November the little brig was bounding over the billows, careening before the freshening breeze. A low, monotonous, humming sound accompanied her—like the rustling of silk, or very soft tissue paper crumpled in the hand—less a sound than a manifestation of silence peculiar to the time and place.

Antibes was vanishing in the distance, showing like a small speck of yellow that momentarily grew less and less at the base of the overhanging snow-clad Alps, which, on the other hand, seemed to tower larger and more confusedly against the background of leaden sky.

Jean, a sailor two hours old, in heavy boots and thick pea-jacket, was doing his

best to maintain his equilibrium on the brig's sloping deck, his eyes big with wonder at the novelty of it all. It was subject of uneasiness to him to be thus solitary among strangers, on those few frail planks that seemed endowed with life and were flying from the world of his acquaintance; he was awed by the melancholy waste of immensity that surrounded him on every hand, and became with each succeeding moment more grand and somber.

The others of the crew were there as well, watching like him, but with emotions of a different and lower order, the receding land, where their stay had been longer than usual and the restraints and enforced sobriety of sea life had been relaxed. These, Jean's new companions, were six in number: a Maltese, black as an Arab, ragged, exposing his bare chest to the keen evening breeze; a brace of sturdy rascals from Provence; a roaming vagabond of Bordeaux; and a deserter from the navy, who was careful how he showed his face

in French seaports. All, together with their sea togs, had assumed the look of endurance and impassiveness that is characteristic of the sailor.

While they were hanging about the deck inactive the captain made his appearance aft, a stern, grave man of colossal proportions, whose hair was beginning to be tinged with gray, with dull, lifeless eyes void of all speculation. He gave a command in a hoarse voice, couched in language that was so much Greek to Jean, and as the young man, novice-like, not knowing what to do, smiled and seemed to take the matter as a joke, he soon heard himself recalled to duty in stern, harsh language. He looked at his commander and the smile disappeared from his face; he did not see how there could be such a difference as existed between this man and the one who, only a short while before, had received him at Antibes with such a politely deferential tone, when he came on board, accompanied by his handsomely

dressed mother and stately old grandfather.

A feeling of discouragement rose to our sailor-boy's mind at the reflection that he was the inferior, or at best only the equal, of those beings with whom his lot was cast, and that henceforth he was to render blind obedience to the mandates of his captain. He was oppressed by a horrible sensation of abasement; at a single blow, there in the gathering night, he felt the galling yoke of servitude riveted about his neck.

IX

DAYS succeeded, each like the other, toilsome and joyless, days of which no one could tell the name, forming weeks and months that no one took the pains to count: a time that seemed long in the present, but in the retrospect appeared very brief.

For days they would sail over solitary seas, then would put in at some unfrequented port in Corsica or Italy. The jars of Vallauris had been shipped merely with a view to blinding the authorities and were landed at Leghorn; there were nocturnal departures and mysterious maneuvers as to which no one dared to ask questions. They were as clay in the hands of the potter, and yielded mute obedience to the man who controlled their destinies.

In these furtive stoppages, which were

for the most part made off lonely beaches, where there were no wharves or other facilities for landing, the crew were compelled to do the work of common laborers; barefooted through the briny water, over the deep sand and jagged rocks, they had to carry heavy burdens, sacks and bales of which the contents were unknown to them. But Jean, because there was no one to see him in those wild retreats, accomplished his task with no sense of humiliation; he felt, moreover, that this occupation, like all rough and dangerous callings that carry little profit with them, had a certain aspect of nobility and grandeur. And then, too, this active physical exercise which fatigues and fortifies the body while quieting the mind suited him. At evening only, when night was closing in, out on the broad ocean or in some sequestered bay, did memories of the past return to sadden him.

Through all sorts of weather the stout little smuggler craft, old already and bearing many a scar, tore onward in spite of all;

thrashing through the boisterous, ugly seas, scourged by the icy mistral that stung the men's faces like a needle. "She is my only dependence," the captain once said in his raucous voice, "and I have five children at home. She has got to go or else go under!" It was for Jean's benefit that this explanatory statement—the only one that was ever heard to issue from his mouth—was made; he was beginning to manifest a sort of interest and friendly inclination for his new hand, of which the latter was proud.

Owing to the uncertainty that attended their movements, it was only at remote intervals that he received letters from Antibes; the same envelope always enclosed the handwriting of the two beings dearest to him on earth—his mother's and that of the old grandsire, constantly more tremulous in his declining years. He had a box in which he kept them, as if they had been holy relics, in the securest corner of his damp little locker. They constituted his sole treasure on the vessel, where he

lived in the same squalor and privation as the meanest of the crew.

Sometimes it chanced that a day of repose was granted them; they had to kill time as best they could in some dreary, lifeless village or unfrequented bay. On such occasions Jean, before going ashore, would always put on his best clothes, which no longer fitted him, being too small for his increasing proportions, and had lost their original freshness of color owing to being laid away so long in the dampness. He would have no one with him in his strolls, and for a few brief hours would once more be the boy of other days, loitering in the old garden at Carigou, dreaming long dreams, and giving his fancy leave to roam unchecked. He would walk straight ahead without definite aim or object, meditatively observing strange things and places in his dreamy way, exchanging a look or smile with the girls he met, blondes or brunettes, as might be, now and then inaugurating a passing flirtation,

which, in those localities, came to nothing, but served to trouble his peace of mind. He preferred the toils and perils of the deep to those days of idleness and reflection, which only brought his future too distinctly before his eyes. Distractions of this kind were very brief, however, and very rare; and then they were so quickly forgotten and dismissed, barely leaving behind them in his memory a portrait of the young girl, which, for a few evenings, would return just as slumber was descending.

But for these infrequent respites his home was on the sea, the sea always and in spite of all, be the weather what it might, buffeting the white-fringed waves, struggling against the icy mistral.

X

THUS passed the winter.

A period of delight, almost of enchantment, was the visit they paid in May to the Isle of Rhodes.

Just at the close of the wintry season, which was longer and more severe that year than usual, their poor little craft, that seemed no less than her crew to be in need of refreshment and repose, put into the port of Khandjiotas. The change in latitude, their descent toward the sunny South, which is in itself a sovereign distraction to men's minds, was coincident with the sudden coming of the spring, the springtime of the Orient. Jean could not remain unaffected by the magic of that Levant for which he had so longed, of which he had dreamed so fondly in his distant home, beneath the orange trees of the old garden

at Antibes, and which now presented itself to his eyes in all its tranquil and desolate splendor.

Their repairs would necessitate a stay at the island of a month; a sufficient time almost to become acclimated—and also to fall in love.

The first day was devoted to airing the hold and emptying the moldy lockers of their contents; articles of apparel were hung to dry in the rigging, exposed to the warm breeze, and it seemed as if the little vessel itself shared the general joy at being there, and was glad to have a chance to rest and bask in the bright sunshine.

Oh, the exquisite charm of that first evening, so limpidly tranquil, redolent of strange odors! Jean's duties did not permit him to leave the vessel, but no sooner was his day's work ended than he leaped ashore and seated himself, almost in a recumbent posture, on the ruinous quay, that was soon to become such a familiar object to him. In the attire of the

humble calling he had adopted, he realized, with a voluptuous pleasure, tinged with unutterable melancholy, the fruition of his dream of childhood ; he contemplated the sky ablaze with golden light, and the city whose dead slumberousness was veiled in an atmosphere of gold ; the Orient was revealed to him, more Oriental and more alien than he had ever dreamed of, in the *ensemble* of things, and in their thousand details—and, more than in all besides, in the great forbidding walls that formed an impenetrable barrier to the human life and activity within.

And while he was reclining there alone a young girl appeared—she was a Greek or Syrian, therefore unveiled—who was to him the embodiment of all that Orient. She was very young, with heavy, intensely black eyes, and her henna-stained hair was of an unnatural, fiery red. She advanced with a hesitating step, then, perceiving the reclining sailor, crossed over toward the vessel and walked along the row of flag-

stones that formed the coping of the quay to obtain a nearer view. Her long eyes, black as blackest night and half-closed between their fringe of dark lashes, half-concealed by the red locks that straggled from beneath her spangled head-dress, shot inquisitive glances at Jean's blue, wide-open eyes and black hair. She smiled and went her way, slowly as she had come, with an undulating motion of the hips that was in harmony with her supple form.

XI

SHE came every evening now at the beautiful golden twilight hour, and all the long day Jean thought of nothing but her coming. His day's work done, quick, he plunged into the clear, cold water, dressed, adjusted his woolen *béret* becomingly over his close-cropped hair, and then, with a lover's eagerness, jumped from the deck to the stone quay, there to smoke his Turkish cigarette and wait for her arrival; and suddenly she would appear above him in the distance, at the end of a steep path, where the old frowning walls formed an angle. She would come to him, making her way downward from the old quarter of the town, casting anxious looks behind her as if in fear of being followed; stepping

leisurely, she would draw near, bold in her innocence, ignorant of the danger that lies in loving.

Jean would not stir, but wait for her to come to him. With a smile on her lips she would stop, give him a flower, a cluster of orange blossoms, or the common rose of the East that is so deliciously fragrant; sometimes she would address him a few words in her mongrel French: how long would he remain at Khandjiotas? Where would he go next? and then would pass on with a saucy laugh upon her face, negativing with vehement gestures of indignation or entreaty any attempt of his to follow her.

He was never his own master until night, and as the town was Turkish, it was a matter of course that as soon as it became dark the gates were shut tight and fast. What could he do under those circumstances?

Not only did she embody for him the charm of the country that so deliciously

disturbs the senses, but it even seemed as if those fleeting interviews and brief smiles were symbolical of Jean's future life of unrealized aspirations and ephemeral joys.

XII

Two weeks later they were making appointments to meet each other in a retired spot, half an hour after her appearance on the quay, when it was almost night. She allowed him to steal a kiss and would return it, but nothing more, and would run from him and seek shelter behind the great gray walls, threatening to return no more. And he, knowing it to be impossible to find her should she choose to hide, and fearing to lose her, would let her go. "If you were going to stay here," said she, "or if you even expected to return, why, then——" But he could give her no assurance that he would return; he was as ignorant as she of what the morrow had in store for him; poor tyro on board a smuggling craft, penniless, unable to call his soul his own, what plans could he make for the

future? He was entirely at the mercy of the dark and mysterious man who was in command, and could say or promise nothing. That being the case he had perforce to remain satisfied with whatever favors his red-haired girl chose to grant him.

XIII

JUNE came in with all its dazzling splendor, and the day of departure from the island was close at hand. Three, perhaps four, more of their stolen meetings, then all would be ended between them, doubtless forever. While reflecting on their parting and telling himself that the joy of conquest would remain forever incomplete, he felt within him that unfathomable sensation of sadness that is connected in some inscrutable manner with things purely physical. And the Orient, of which that girl stood as the personification to his imagination, cast its immense poetic glamour on his fleshly regrets.

But there came a letter from Antibes, silencing his regrets and changing everything.

The handwriting was his mother's, hers alone. The dear old grandfather was very ill, she said. And from her manner of expressing herself, as if to prepare him for the worst, he saw that the case was very serious—a very different matter and more irremediable, doubtless, than the departure from Rhodes. Then, as the memory of the poor old man, in his white neckcloth and black frock coat, rose to his mind, his heart grew very heavy; more poignantly than ever he reproached himself with all the suffering he had caused him, the bitter disappointment that he had inflicted on him at the time he went away. And he thought with affright of the long distance that lay between them, of the time it would take him to return by sail, of the intentions of the close-mouthed captain, who would likely wish to break the voyage at intervening ports. It filled him with anguish and despair to be so utterly insignificant and helpless, to be without money to make his way home by the swift mail route, to be powerless to

hasten his return to him who perhaps was doomed to die.

And that Orient, that had so charmed him, now suddenly appeared to him as a deathly sarcophagus of gold, in which he was imprisoned and of which he could not raise the lid. She was indifferent to him now, he almost hated her, the handsome girl who came down to him at eventide from the old walled city, and the kisses that he had not the courage to withhold were joyless, bitter to the taste, and troubled by remorse.

Until then the possibility that he might sometime lose his grandfather had never occurred to him, as is commonly the case with children who have never seen Death strike down without warning those near and dear to them; seeing him always active and erect, always the same, and having all his life known him as he was then, Jean had not reflected that he was a very old man. His existence appeared to him as something stable and immovable, which he

considered in much the same light that he did their house at Antibes, as a nest that was wholly his and could never be taken from him.

XIV

HE arrived at Antibes in the subsequent month of July, having received no further advices in the intervening time. The taciturn captain, who was well disposed toward him, allowed him to go ashore immediately, without detaining him to assist in the labors necessitated by their arrival in port. And in the same suit that he had worn when he went away, neatly brushed, but yellow now with age and much too small for him, he made his way through the city of his birth with a humility that was new to him, turning to look at no one, unmindful of his faded garments and appearance nearly indicative of poverty.

Antibes lay silent in the fierce, blinding sunshine. Quick, quick, Jean hastened to

the house with all the speed he was capable of, feeling his legs giving way beneath him in his impatient anxiety, trembling as he had never trembled before on coming home.

The door of the house was ajar, and just within it was the screen of muslin that in hot countries is universally used to keep out the flies. Miette, standing there in the cool, dark corridor, said to him: "Ah, Monsieur Jean!" in a tone that chilled his blood, that suddenly brought to his memory the tone in which she had addressed him on the day when he failed in his examination for the Naval School.

"Grandfather?" he asked in a low, beseeching voice, as if he had lost ten years of his life—were a child almost. "Where is grandfather?"

The groan that answered his question told him all. His mother had heard him and came down from the room above; they met on the stairs, and for a long time remained locked in each other's arms, and she wept in silence, saying nothing, because

she saw that he had encountered Miette and knew all.

With a buzzing in his head as of one who has sustained a great shock, he ascended with his mother to their little first floor drawing-room. A shabby-looking man was there, dressed in a shiny black frock coat, and on the table were displayed some silver forks and spoons, arranged in pairs.

“Very well, then ; take them at your price, monsieur,” said the mother, impatient, now her boy was there, to conclude the business she had begun.

Then, while the two stood looking on in silence with unutterable regret depicted on their faces, the man placed a roll of bank-notes on the table and pocketed the forks and spoons, their family silver, marked with the grandsire’s monogram, that had done service at their dinners in the old bygone days.

And as soon as he had left the room she caught her son by the hands :

“Yes, my poor child, I had to sell those

things, and all beside will have to go—all, all—the house and garden, everything, all that we possess! His pension helped me to live—but now that he is gone—I can no more!" She spoke a little disconnectedly, like one whose wits were wandering, her mind apparently not fixed on the terrible things she was saying, which nevertheless had caused her long hours of agonized despair—for she was distracted by Jean's presence, by the joy of having him at her side, of contemplating him, admiring him, so handsome, so tall and strong.

He cast himself into his mother's arms and rested his cheek upon her shoulder, as if to seek comfort there and protection against the calamity that threatened to overwhelm and crush them.

XV

THE three succeeding months were a period of deepest misery and distress to them, pervaded by a horrible sensation of suspense; one of those periods during which one can apply himself to nothing, has courage to undertake nothing—what availed it even to keep in order the poor dear house that was soon to be taken from them—

Lawyers and men of business were coming and going constantly. She had tried, reluctantly and with a sense of humiliation, to enlist the sympathies of the other Bernys and prevail on them to help her a little and save her the necessity of parting with the home of her fathers. But the rich cousins declared it would be no less than madness, that it would only be bringing more complete ruin down upon her

head, that it would be best to sell, put her affairs in shape, and get the matter ended. And she sold.

When the irrevocable step was decided on the days seemed to fly by with greater swiftness, as in those evil dreams where time has no duration.

And the evening of the day that witnessed the signing of the deed, when they were seated together before the family board, the dinner, served as ever by old Miette, was to them as a funeral repast, their evening as one devoted to watching by the bedside of a corpse.

Her plans were fully decided on: since Jean, whose eighteenth year was now at hand, must seek employment in his vocation, and as she herself must toil, must lead the life of a workingwoman, then the further from Antibes they were the better it would be; they would put the whole width of France between them and their old home; she would go and settle with him in some one of the northern seaport

towns. Toulon was too near; she had acquaintances there, and then, too, Jean would have to spend at least a year at Brest, on board the naval training ship. At Brest, therefore, they would go and live, where their poverty would escape invidious comment.

It was in October that the new owner gave them a week to remove their belongings from the house and prepare for their departure. As soon as they were gone workmen were to come in and tear up everything, replacing old with new; nothing of all that the departing exiles had loved so well was fine enough for these fastidious successors. So they applied themselves to selecting those poor things that they were most attached to; but when it came to choosing, behold! they were attached to everything; no object was so valueless that they did not feel a pang at leaving it behind. And still they must be content to carry away so little!

Jean helped his mother, relieving her of

the more laborious work and making packing cases for the goods that were to be forwarded by the freight train. Each morning he would awake in the little chamber of his boyhood and say to himself in bitterness of spirit: "Yet another day nearer to that when I shall look on this for the last time!" And the house was being gradually emptied of its contents—the house that they no longer took pains to sweep and set in order, that was littered with the straw of the packing cases. The wonted aspect of the place was destroyed beyond the possibility of recognition.

He packed away with loving care a thousand small objects that reminded him of his boyish days; in particular, the copy-books that he had used at college, and in which he had jotted down his dreams of travel and adventure; they would be of use to him, too, later on, when he came to study up for his examination as master of a vessel.

The only time each day he left the

house was when he went to stroll for a little about the old place of Carigou, the key of which had been left in their keeping, in the well-loved garden, now overgrown with weeds, that was assuming the air of a neglected graveyard. It was the same season of the year, the tranquil days were luminous with the same mellow sunlight, as when he visited the spot the preceding autumn, alone, as he was to-day, to indulge in reveries, no less sad than those of the present moment, of departure for the isles of the Levant. And he plucked the leaves of certain shrubs, the flowers of certain rose trees, that he might press them and carry them with him in memory of the spot he loved so well.

XVI

“JEAN!” Mme. Berny called to her son in a sad regretful voice, interrupting her occupation of emptying a closet of its contents; “Jean, come here! Do you remember this?” and she held up before his eyes a little shirt of fine cambric.

He did not remember at first, it was so remote; but suddenly, oh, yes! the garment he had worn at the *Fête-Dieu*!

She had felt a desire to take one last look at it in his presence before putting it aside with the things that were to be destroyed or sold, but Jean insisted they should take it with them, and it was deposited, carefully wrapped and folded, in one of the trunks that were to accompany them to their land of exile.

“And this?” said she, displaying a little

brown hat, with long velvet ribbons depending from it.

Then mournful memories of the past came streaming back upon his mind, and he recalled a certain Easter Sunday and the dinner he partook of on that bright day of spring, seated beside the old grandfather, now dead and gone ; and from his heart of hearts there rose a feeling of infinite melancholy, a melancholy more inexplicable and cheerless in its mysterious essence than any that this leave-taking had caused him yet.

Oh, no ; he could not endure the thought of parting with that little hat ; it was decided that it should make the journey to Brest in company with the little cambric shirt which occupied so small a space.

The grandsire's frock coat, his silver-headed cane, and various other things that had been his, were also to go. For people as poor as they, it must be admitted that they encumbered themselves with a great deal of useless luggage.

XVII

THE last day! And a day so bright and clear, so joyful in its sunny splendor, as if to inspire in them a keener regret for what they were about to leave behind, an incomparable day in early November.

They were to start that evening at a late hour and travel by a night train.

Jean had a multitude of things to attend to yet, and his packing was incomplete; he made haste to finish his work, that he might have an hour before the sun went down to revisit his garden of Carigou, and indulge in reverie there.

It was a moderately long walk from the city to the garden. When he unlocked the gate and entered there, night was close at hand: the horizontal rays of the dying luminary, red as the light of a great conflagration, were striking through the

branches and gilding the trunks of the old, impassive trees. The melancholy of each of the endings that were so close at hand impressed itself on him and sank into his soul; the ending day, the ending autumn, and that other ending, more poignant than all, their final departure from their home.

Attachment to places, to trees, to walls, is with some of us, particularly in early youth, extremely powerful; it may be that in imagining we experience feelings of love and regret for those inanimate things, we are only lamenting the vanishment of that which existed within our own being, and which shone in them by a reflected light. It seemed to Jean that that sale to strangers, that taking from him of objects that were his, could never despoil him of his right of possession to those things, which he looked on as being endowed almost with faculties of reason and reflection; they would always be his property, not the property of those who had bought them. And who can tell

if, before the commencement of his terrestrial existence, others, strangers, had not left a portion of their spiritual being in those same places, and experienced illusions like his own——

The light that had been casting rings and bands of gold on the venerable tree trunks suddenly faded and went out, and the silence of the garden seemed to become deeper and more intense; the sun had set, and with the approach of night a chill breeze arose.

It was time to return. Jean cast a look about him on the grass-grown walks, as if to say farewell to them, and turned to go. Very slowly, with many a backward, lingering look, he closed and locked the antique postern with an impression of *nevermore*, of absolute and eternal nevermore.

Then came their dinner, when neither of them ate; a fragmentary dinner of odds and ends, served by the weeping Miette, and lighted by a solitary candle placed in the centre of the table.

The evening passed heavily while waiting for the final moment. Everything was ready ; there was nothing left for them to do ; they were alone together in the chill solitude of the naked drawing-room, that had been stripped forever of the old familiar objects that they loved. In silence they awaited the coming of the carriage that was to bear them away, as one condemned to die on the scaffold awaits the cart.

Jean, bearing a candle in his hand, would from time to time leave the room to go over the house once more, to take a last look at his little chamber. He might not even console himself, boylike, with the promise that he would buy all back again at some future day, for those new-comers, scorning the humble home that his mother had tended with such loving care, were to begin their work of destruction on the morrow.

About ten o'clock there was a sound of wheels in the street, a dull, menacing rum-

ble at first, in the distance, on the stones. Jean was the first to hear it. When they were apprized of what it was, that an omnibus from the station had halted before their door, it was as if Death had touched them with his icy finger, and instinctively mother and son threw themselves into each other's arms.

They descended the stairs ; from the corridor below Miette's sobs came to their ears. Behind them the doors, with their familiar creaking, heard so oft that they had come to love the sound, now to be heard no more forever, closed with a clang, as definitely, as irrevocably as the cover of a sepulchre.

XVIII

AT Brest, to which they came in the early morning, by the raw, pale light of breaking day, they were chilled and transfixed—poor fugitives from a land of sunshine—by the change of climate that manifested itself in everything, in the wintry weather, in the gray, lifeless atmosphere that pervaded the place.

They caused themselves to be directed to a small hotel of the second class, displaying the timid, retiring manner of those who wish to limit their expenditure and look closely to their small change. The young man allowed himself to be guided and controlled in everything as if he were once more a little child, without will of his own, passively obedient, with a bitter grief constantly present in his heart. He suffered himself to be slightly interested at

times, however, by all the strange sights that this sombre city of gray granite had to show him, with its massive ramparts, its hardy maritime population and its cloudy sky ; he often turned in the streets to have a look at the bluejackets, of whose fraternity he was soon to be a member, half charmed, half frightened sometimes, by this peep into the unknown of the life that lay before him.

They were some days before they found a dwelling place that came near suiting them. Everything that was shown them, within their narrow means, was so squalid and repulsive.

She found less difficulty than he in bringing her mind down to the idea of those plebeian surroundings, that were destined to be, for a long time, if not forever, the enframement of her ruined life. Her spirit of rebellion against her fate, the objections of her bourgeois pride, had sensibly diminished ; she could bow to her

destiny without excessive bitterness, if only the pitiful details might remain unknown to the other Bernys, if she might not have to drain her cup of humiliation beneath their eyes. And then her Jean, who was so entirely hers once more, who had drawn so close to her, served very nearly to console her for all, to compensate for all.

But he, who doubtless had inherited from the father's side a greater instinctive refinement, he, on the other hand, grew restive under poverty that was patent to the world. When on board ship his sailor temperament could endure without complaining the coarseness of his associates and the privations of a seaman's life, but on land he experienced an unconquerable aversion for everything that was repulsive or smacked too much of vulgar poverty; it wounded him cruelly to see his mother derogate thus, in dress, in surroundings, in habits of daily life. He had the will and the hope to raise her from her present condition at some future day; he would not

consider their then way of living other than as a temporary makeshift. And in the receding distance of the irrevocable past, that they had so lately put behind them, fair Provence and the loved home down yonder stood prominently out before his vision, a spot of brightness in the midst of murky shadows, as if illuminated by the level rays of a glorious sunset.

They finally decided—they had to make up their mind to something, for the hotel was too expensive—they decided on an apartment on the third floor of a house in the main street, not far from the harbor. It was a gloomy place, opening on a dark and noisome court. There was a single window commanding an outlook on the street ; from it they had a view of the by-passers below, splashing through the liquid mud in their wooden shoes, and on Sundays reeling and staggering ; in the distance a portion of the Arsenal was visible, and a corner of the sailors' barracks on the hill of Recouvrance ; on every hand were tall and massive

granite structures, of a deep hue of gray, that shone and glistened in the rain.

They promised themselves that they would make a change at some future day, would try to find something better elsewhere. They installed themselves at first in their new abode as if not intending to remain there long, and complemented as inexpensively as possible what little furniture they had brought with them from Provence, because they could not find it in their heart to sell it. And when the cases that had come by the more tardy freight train were brought upstairs and opened; when the dearly prized objects, that had made the journey from their old home, began to show their familiar faces in the dull gray light within the walls of the abode of exile, Jean and his mother, not daring to look each other in the face lest they might be unable to control their sobs, wept silent and slowly falling tears, that seemed to come from the very bottom of their torn and bleeding hearts.

XIX

Two more months are numbered among the past; it is midwinter now. It is Sunday, the day when the barracks are deserted and the bluejackets, abroad in the dim gray light of the narrow streets of the lower town, air their careless merriment, their bright uniforms gayly trimmed with red, and the light blue of their wide turn-back collars. A pale sun casts its light on the rain-washed granite walls, and, as is often the case in January, in this quarter of Brittany where the sea takes the land in its arms and warms it, the weather is mild and pleasant.

Mother and son were leaning together from the window that looked upon the street, the window that was the one single attractive point about their new dwelling,

its one eye that enabled it to see what was going on in the outside world. She, very simply dressed, more simply than Jean would have wished her to be, almost a woman of the people in her deep mourning; he, in sailor attire. Already quite accustomed to his new dress, he wore with the proper degree of unstudied negligence the wide collar that is thrown open in such a way as to display the bronzed neck. There was some slight change to be noted in his face; he was handsomer, perhaps owing to the silky black beard that he had allowed to grow on cheeks and chin according to the regulations of the service; but the eyes were the same, the ardent and dreamy eyes of a child.

When Jean was at home and the sun condescended to favor them with a little of his light, they often sat there together by that window, and had almost begun to look on it with eyes of friendship. For little by little, slowly, very slowly, in that different and lower sphere, whither they

had been hurled like wreckage after a storm, they were returning to life after the great disaster, the sundering of ties, whose effect had been little less annihilating to them than that of death itself—he, because he was so very young, she, the mother, because she was there with him. And that mean abode, that they had first accepted with loathing and disgust, lo ! habit was beginning to render it more attractive in their sight, and for the moment they had abandoned all thought of leaving it. She had accomplished wonders, moreover, in the way of arrangement, purification and embellishment, repairing with her own hands the rents in the tattered old paper on the walls, putting up at the windows cheap muslin curtains that gave the premises a bright air of cheerfulness. In the most conspicuous places she had put the few ornaments that they had brought from Antibes, the candelabra, the vases that had decorated the mantelshelf in the drawing-room down yonder, and

other small objects that were endeared to them by association.

Safely bestowed in the depths of a great clothes press were the more sacred of their relics. There reposed the coat that the grandfather had worn last, his spectacles and silver-headed cane, with some volumes of his favorite authors, and note books filled with memoranda in his tremulous old man's handwriting. Close beside them, on the same shelf, were certain small articles of apparel, priceless souvenirs of Jean's childhood: the shirt in which he had impersonated an angel at the *Fête-Dieu*, and, in a pasteboard box, carefully wrapped in green gauze, the memorable little brown felt hat of that long-past Easter Sunday.

He himself, formerly so inexpert and helpless in matters of household detail, was untiring in his care for this poor little kingdom where mother and son held sway, moving furniture about, driving nails, and taking off his jacket to scrub the floor, an operation that reminded him of holy-stoning

the deck on shipboard. His roving instincts slumbered for the time ; remorse had dulled and blunted them. It would have seemed to him the depth of baseness to do anything that might add to his mother's distress ; he was swayed by his affection and sentiment of tender compassion ; with the sensation of being his own master, since he was a sailor, he was of his own free will submissive and obedient—and that was the only possible way in which he could be so—and his self-imposed servitude even came to be easy and pleasant to him. At evening he came straight home from the barracks, devoting all his hours of liberty to his mother, never going for a stroll unless accompanied by her, and on such occasions giving her his arm with a charming air of sedateness that she had never known in him before.

XX

IT is the summer season of the succeeding year.

They entertained a friendlier feeling for their humble quarters now that they had spent eighteen months together in them. Still, however, the old wound did not heal ; their banishment was hard to bear, and regret for the dear paternal home was no less poignant than ever. The memory of Provence constantly grew fainter and more indistinct, but in the same measure it was crowned with a bright aureole of golden hue, like a vanished Eden. The most worthless object among their household goods that came from *home* was a sacred thing apart, not to be touched save in a spirit of awed respect, and that never failed to excite feelings of sudden melancholy, to

induce a quicker and more painful throbbing of the heart.

Jean had just finished his time on board the *Bretagne*, a large sailing vessel, anchored in the roadstead, where the fog always lay thick, that did duty as a schoolship. The simple and wholesome life that the young men lead, constantly exposed to the damp, salt-laden breezes, to the strong west winds that fill the lungs with oxygen, is a Spartan regimen, and acts differently on different constitutions, eliminating the weak and strengthening the strong.

Jean's natural vigor and robustness had increased considerably under these conditions. He was a good sailor, moreover, attentive to his duties, alert and energetic, and at the same time obedient and chary of his words. His innate independence did not rebel against the iron strictness of the discipline; he, who was so quick to resent individual interference, accepted this particular yoke, which is not hard to bear for the very reason that it is impersonal and

uniform, and frequently ends in reclaiming the most untamable and refractory natures.

Always punctual at drill, never mistaking one rope for another in the complicated tangle of the rigging, never shirking his duty, he had every quality of the perfect seaman. In addition to his other merits he had speedily acquired the spirit of dandyism that is characteristic of the service: the jaunty manner of wearing the uniform, the correct angle at which to sport the red-tasseled flat cap, which is kept in shape by a hoop of whalebone, the unvaryingly immaculate whiteness of the coarse duck jacket and trousers.

But by no consideration could he ever prevail on himself to take up any kind of intellectual labor, for the greater his physical activity, the less disposed he was to mental application. An acquired roughness of manner and lack of sociability overlaid without extinguishing the germs of art and poetry that were originally inherent in him, and which, developed by the education of

his earlier years, were at present indestructible. Without losing his native air of distinction, he was constantly becoming more and more a sailor, in looks, language and manners, a twofold character that has nothing inconsistent in it, however. It is a privilege accorded the seafaring man that he may in many instances display the most astonishing freedom in language and behavior, and yet never be trivial or vulgar, never *proletarian*.

So therefore, under these changed external conditions, he still remained one whom mention of the immemorial Orient or a mystical, sonorous phrase would suffice to plunge into depths of reverie, into an unfathomable gulf of melancholy. A boy withal, always and ever a great boy, in his careless disregard of the future, even in his pleasures, associating with the youngest and most artless of his comrades, and going now and then to laugh in company with them at the wildest, most extravagant and fantastic spectacles. He furthermore still

continued to be that one who, in the old days at Antibes, had befriended the old beggars in the street, and saved little kittens from premature death by drowning in the gutter; reserving his kindness and pity for the more humble among his shipmates and those from whom fortune withheld her smiles.

At intervals, as inclination prompted, he abandoned himself nowadays to his old propensity for adventures of the street, which had lain dormant for a long time after their arrival at Brest. On leaving the barracks of a fine evening he would allow himself to be diverted from his homeward road by the pretty muslin coif of some gentle Breton maiden, or by the gay feathers of some bonnet encountered on the highway, and would afterward exculpate himself to his anxiously waiting mother by a wonderful story manufactured out of whole cloth, lying in such cases with no more compunction than a child, for the sake of saving her pain. And if he was

detected and convicted of his deceitful intentions, he would lower his laughing eyes with the manner of a schoolboy caught red-handed in some peccadillo, who has no remorse and will do the same thing again as soon as the teacher's back is turned. In all other respects, however, he manifested such respect and tender devotion for his mother that the poor lady was comparatively happy in her altered circumstances.

In their modest way of living, too, a little ease and comfort were beginning to return to the forlorn little household. When the affairs in Provence came to be finally settled up, the widow found that she had left a small capital sufficient to produce an annual income of seven or eight hundred francs, and after bravely serving her apprenticeship, she was now working at embroidering the ornaments and insignia of gold that are worn by naval officers.

She dressed with extreme simplicity, almost like a working woman, in spite of all Jean could do or say, who worried a

good deal over his mother's gowns and thought they could never be too fine; it pained him to see her go out upon the street wearing a little black worsted shawl, and it was his constant dream that some day he would restore her to her former position in life. The neighbors, the other tenants of the immense granite barrack where they lived, and of which the walls were always dripping with moisture, had been made to keep their distance during the first few months, then gradually closer relations had developed. They said: "They are people who have seen better days," and being good-hearted women at bottom, they did not harbor malice toward the strangers for their coolness on first acquaintance.

With the family in Provence a few letters had been exchanged at first at rare and increasing intervals. But the answers to their missives came more and more tardily, and when they came were more and more insolently patronizing toward this ruined

widow and her son the bluejacket, and so they allowed their relations with Antibes to fall into a state of desuetude—until that day, the object of their dreams, when Jean, wearing a captain's uniform, should present himself once more with head erect in his native land, and bring his mother to her own again. And now that poor old Miette, in her unwillingness to serve other masters, had gone away to die, up in her village among the mountains, they had the distinct impression that they two were alone in the world, that they were two lonely outcasts, whom no one acknowledged, and who had ceased to be of account to anyone.

For whom, then, should she trouble herself to maintain the dress and appearance of a lady? There were moments of discouragement when she was tempted to give up and let everything go by the board, and when her Jean, with a pride greater than hers, reasoned with her kindly, "Well, what can you expect from a sailor's moth-

er!" she would answer in a tone bordering on bitterness, which recalled the misunderstandings and harsh words of days gone by, but the effect of which she would make haste to temper with a kiss and an affectionate smile.

XXI

THEIR second year at Brest was drawing to an end.

On an evening when the weather was more than usually fine mother and son were seated at *their window*—that is to say, at the single window of their mean and contracted dining-room, which was the only one that looked upon the street. It was there, whenever the west wind did not blow too hard, that their pleasantest moments were spent, in restful idleness and conversation. The thickness of the wall, substantial as a city's rampart, afforded a wide comfortable place on which to rest their elbows, and they had furnished it with a cushion covered with red cloth, as the usage of the quarter demanded should be done for the windows of every apart-

ment that laid any claim at all to gentility.

What they beheld from there had not the attraction of strangeness or unfamiliarity ; there were certain persons who came and went regularly every day at the same hour that they looked on as old acquaintances, so well had they come to know their faces and general aspect ; some afforded Jean food for merriment, and he would counterfeit the voice of a little child and say something like this : "Wait for me, mother dear ; the young lady with the parrot's nose has not gone by yet, and you know I can't come to the table until she does." Beneath them, slightly raised above the level of the sidewalk, was an ancient terrace of granite on which was a tiny garden with a border of box ; twice already they had beheld in it the growth and blossoming of the same flowers, fuchsias and geraniums, and a few sickly, stunted roses ; of those luxuriant southern vines that brighten up old walls so cheerfully there

was no trace, but growing from the crevices between the stones were plants that had never been set out there: mosses, ferns and the homely pink foxglove, friends and parasites of the cold Breton granite. And some portion of themselves had already passed into this *entourage* and remained there; what they loved was not the locality, but their own anterior existence, that had taken possession of the locality, and, so to speak, impregnated it—and particularly their anterior state of mutual love and tenderness, destined to perish and be forgotten.

Among the self-imposed deceptions of life is the hold that we allow inanimate objects to take on us—a hold almost as tenacious as that of living beings, although the latter, it is true, are shorter lived than the former. Our attachment to localities, to relics, as well as to memories and traditions, is really but a more cultivated form, a form adapted to our more highly developed intelligence, of the universal senti-

ment of self-preservation. Dumb animals, when death appears imminent to them, simply avoid it by flight, or defend themselves as well as they can with the means that nature has provided them with, but against time, which is constantly destroying them, they have no resource. We, who are molded from the same clay and will doubtless return to the same dust, endeavor to defend ourselves by lofty dreams, by hopes of futurity, and by sublime prayers and invocations; or otherwise, by love of our childhood's home, of a house long inhabited by our ancestors, by the affection and respect we bestow on the poor little objects of every sort that are connected in any way with our irrevocable past. The attachment to things and places, that has its source in the fear of death, is the most childish of all human cults, reserve being made of that malignant cult of disappointed incredulity, to which we return after having sounded the unfathomable black void of wavering belief.

Jean and his mother had been wishing since morning for fine weather, in order that they might pass this evening, the last before their parting, together at their window ; he was to start the morrow on a ten months' cruise. And if it had been made expressly to their order it could not have been more accordant with their desire, this rare, warm, limpid twilight, which produced in them the illusion of being somewhere else, of being far away, nearer the sunny south. There was not a breath of air stirring, not a cloud to be seen in the heavens, and, indeed, the beauty of the evening exceeded their wishes ; such summerlike resplendency added to their melancholy and made their parting more painful, by reminding them of their loved Provence, where evenings like this occur so frequently.

The *Résolue* was to leave the yard the next morning on her annual cruise in the waters of the Atlantic, and Jean was to be on board of her. He had arranged all his plans for the future, and they showed a

great deal of judgment and good sense ; he would return the following summer, wearing the stripes of a quartermaster, then he would ship without delay for a long cruise that would bring his term of enlistment to a close ; he would be very economical, and with his savings on his return would take a course in hydrography, and pass the examination required by law before he could command a merchant ship.

With these fine schemes in his head it would have been well for him to rub up his mathematics a bit. The text-books he had used at college, together with his notes of the professor's lectures, were piled on the table in his bedroom, but he never consulted them except to open them, from time to time, for a look at the flowers from Cari-gou that were drying between their pages. By natural inclination, and by reason of his excessive fondness for physical exercise, he was indolent and incapable of exertion where intellectual labor was concerned ; for mathematical studies in particular he

had an insuperable aversion, he whose comprehension was so acute in matters pertaining to poetry and art.

Night was closing in, slowly and reluctantly, replacing the beautiful twilight. In the street below men and women, coming in from their evening stroll, were beginning to appear against the darker background of wall and pavement as indistinct dark masses, dotted here and there by the white coifs of the females. And by degrees this last evening stamped itself indelibly on both their memories, even as so many fugitive moments of our lives stamp themselves there, no one can tell why, to the exclusion of so many others. It occurred to Jean that he had really come to have a friendly feeling for that corner by the window ; for the various sights afforded by the quarter ; for that terrace garden that was not even part of his hired domicile, and for those fragile flowers that unknown hands had reared. And she, the mother, now let fall her head upon her bosom, seeing nothing

of what was going on without, her mind filled with anguish there in the gathering darkness at the thought of ten months of weary waiting, of the long winter that lay before her, so desolate and lonely, without her boy.

XXII

ON the broad ocean. Stretching on every hand, far as the eye can see, the infinite expanse of deep blue sea. Above the deck the towering fabric of snow-white sails and brown, tarry ropes, domain of Jean and the other topmen; a mechanism of wondrous organization, a thing of life almost, where every motor nerve has its name, its function and its life; and, circulating among all those intricacies, the crew, that is to say, some hundreds of men, brought together by chance, whose names have suddenly been converted into numbers and whose personalities are absorbed in the duties they have to perform. In the case of those young and simple-minded men, who lead a life of isolation, cut off from the world and its affairs, the individual being suffers annihilation no less than in monastic com-

munities ; the interest they manifest in what is going on around them from day to day is limited to asking one another if the drill went off with snap and animation, if the log has been heaved recently and what showing did it make, was the navigating officer successful in getting his reckoning. In the orderly arrangement of this complicated whole everyone restricts himself to playing the special and unalterable part that is assigned to him ; he is the generator of the physical force that is required at such a given point at such a given moment, he is the spring of flesh and blood that serves to tighten a certain rope and never any other ; his, too, is the hand that at a fixed moment of each succeeding day proceeds to scour this hard wood pulley or polish that iron bolt ; he accomplishes automatically the succession of duties that others before him—strangers, now forgotten, who bore the same number—accomplished with the same undeviating regularity. And in this entire renunciation of all

volition and freedom of action, the wholesome and invigorating life they lead hardens the muscles, gives them their superficial gayety and brings the ready laugh to their lips, and makes it possible for them to throw themselves down anywhere, no matter how hard the plank, no matter what the hour of day or night, and at once lose themselves in slumber, peaceful as a little child's, soon as the shrill call of the boatswain's whistle has ceased to reverberate in their ears.

But all are not equally *insouciant*; in those who are naturally inclined to reflection, reverie, beneath this superabundant material life, assumes a greater intensity in a more restricted sphere. In some, also, there is, so to speak, a twofold development of the nature, an outer and an inner man. A topman, for example, all whose talk is of ropes and sails, for whom life seems to have no object outside of his seaman's calling, you will find at bottom to be a child-like being whose thoughts are centred in

some little hamlet of the Breton coast, in the affections and small interests he has left there behind him in his distant home. And those things alone are accounted by him as having any importance ; he talks and does his duty on board ship mechanically, his mind far away, unobservant of the strange countries he visits, unmoved by the inconceivable immensity of the sea.

In the tranquil evening hours of idleness, a sailor (No. 218, we will suppose him to be, foretop starboard yardarm) becomes once more the Pierre or Jean-Marie of his earlier days, and goes and seats himself beside another young man from his neighborhood, who has also resumed his individuality of other times. They question each other, they seek in their dull, groping way to penetrate the mystery of each other's soul, and thus a sort of brotherhood is inaugurated between those who have embraced a calling so full of danger and fatigue.

Jean, for his part, spun yarns and conversed indifferently with all hands in their

own language and manner, a thorough sailor at heart, and for the rest sufficiently elevated by education and refinement above the remainder of the ship's company to be able to indulge in a quiet, good-natured laugh now and then at their artless communications.

XXIII

EVERY day, long drills and exercises, unlimited expenditure of muscular force, the sailors' rude, long-drawn song timing the execution of the movement, the shrill piping of the boatswain's whistle, the rattle of ropes running through the blocks, the sound of laboring chests, of muscles contracting and expanding beneath duck jackets; all the noisy labor that is required to animate those immense, widespread objects that are called sails, and give to them the lightness and power that reside in the pinions of feathered things.

But at eventide, in the delicious balmy weather, the hours of tranquillity returned once more, the watches beneath the stars. After the sun had gone down in glory the men collected on the deck to idle, spin yarns and sleep, to the accompaniment of

the gentle soothing motion of the vessel, in the pure, clear air. Gathering in little social groups they related thrilling tales of adventure or sung songs until sleep, the great restorer, came to them.

As for Jean, in the beginning those were hours of darkness and gloom; all in vain was it that he stretched himself nonchalantly on the deck like the others, with equal means to theirs of making himself comfortable; he felt that his nature was more complex than theirs, infinitely more complex. And then those were the only moments he had when he could think of the future, of the difficulties that lay before him, of the money that he must have later on to pay for instruction at Brest, of the toil and study he would have to undergo before he could obtain his captain's certificate.

No, he could not see his way clear as to how he was ever to pass that examination. He felt moreover that on the *Résolue* the life of muscular exertion that he was lead-

ing was taking too much out of him, that every day his mind was becoming more and more impenetrable to mathematical abstractions.

The poor college note-books, that he had requested his mother to send to him on ship-board and which he prized as if they had been relics, were suffering terribly from abrasion of the corners, in spite of all his care, in the clothes-bag where he had stowed them; they were grown yellow, and the ink was faint and pale with age. The dark tangle of mysterious lines and figures between their covers was becoming less and less intelligible to him, an undecipherable riddle, a treatise on occult arcana. And it would be necessary to learn all that afresh, and astronomy to boot! When he had time and came to think the matter over in the calm repose of evening, the impossibilities that lay in his way terrified him; it seemed to him that he never could master them, that to try would be waste of time.

Then he would comfort himself with the thought that he had years before him, that the time was not yet come for him to apply himself and bother his brains with work ; and he would bend his ear to listen to the great children who were chattering on every side of him, and laugh at their artless talk—and a smile would rise to his lips, a smile and oblivion. Without troubling himself to think about it, he was gradually retrograding and, in a dangerous and perhaps definitive way, declining upon that life of the sailor that he had in the first place accepted only as a temporary makeshift.

On days of rest, however, when the others applied themselves to their games and sports, or visited the ship's library in quest of books within the range of their intelligence, Jean also often read books that one of the officers loaned him. But for a common foretopman his choice of reading was singular. He renewed his acquaintance with Akedysseril, whose resounding words and magniloquent

phrases had been ringing in his head for years ; he encountered *Heriodade* and *Salammbô*, who, strangers until then, infused the glamour of their melancholy into the vague immensity of his dreamy reverie.

XXIV

WITHIN the tropics, on a wondrous evening when the Southern trades were blowing with their balmiest softness, the corporeal portion of his being tired with a healthy muscular fatigue, gently lulled by the slumberous rhythmic motion of the ship, as a little child is rocked to sleep in his cradle, Jean was half sitting, half lying on the deck in the mild light of the new-born stars, in the midst of the gathering swarm of white-jacketed sailor lads, who were coming up from below, one after another, and forming snug little groups preparatory to passing the pleasant hours of evening in one another's society. And in those moments of calmness and repose that precede slumber his thoughts, as usual, assumed a more sombre cast as

the future and that dreaded examination rose before his mind.

Close at hand, on his right, were his two chosen comrades, Le Marec, quartermaster, and Joal, captain of the mizzen-top, both hailing from the Côtes-du-Nord, surrounded at that moment by a group of young *pays*—or men from their own district—who were listening reverentially to their conversation.

On his left was a little congregation of Basques, a race apart, who every now and then would break out and chatter in an unintelligible jargon, older than the hills.

A little further away another group was singing in chorus a lively air in couplets, in which the refrain: “Old Neptune, Monarch of the Sea” came in every minute or so in a light, catchy way.

Among the Bretons a blood-curdling, marrow-freezing story of mystery and darkness was going on, the confused beginning of which Jean had failed to catch. The yarn was of a suspicious-looking brig, dere-

lict and abandoned by her crew, that had been encountered in the English Channel in the twilight at the close of a dim winter's day; a ghostly wanderer on the water that no one dared board for fear of encountering dead men on her.

The Basques of the group to the left were listening to a wild tale of warlike adventure beneath the blazing sun and on the burning sands of Dahomey.

The two stories, equally lurid and fantastic, reached Jean's ears in disconnected fragments, and were mingled and blended in his brain, over which sleep was beginning to exert its confusing influence, while from the chorus in the distance came the persistently reiterated refrain of "Old Neptune," running thread-like through the whole and connecting the parts by a sort of obligato accompaniment. There is small opportunity for privacy on shipboard of a fine evening, when the crew are all on deck.

"Well," Le Marec was saying—he had

been a fisherman of Brieuc in his younger days—"well, at last we conclude to board her" (it was of that grawsome derelict that he was speaking). "It was none too light, for the weather was thick and the night was close at hand, and I tell you what it is, boys, I felt pretty shaky about that time. All the same, though, I raise my hands and catch onto the gunwale, so as to hoist myself up and get a look at what was inside—and then, my friends, what think you it is I see? A huge tall form, with black face, and horns, and a long pointed beard, that springs to its feet and makes a rush for me—"

"It was the Devil, wasn't it?" asked Joal, convinced that he had guessed aright.

"We thought it was, for certain, for a while—but no; it was only an old billy-goat! but such a great, big fellow, you can't imagine. I don't believe anyone ever saw his like."

And Turubeta, a Basque from Zitzarry,

was running on at the same time, in a voice, that, compared with the deep tones of the honest Bretons, seemed shrill and piercing as a fife.

“It was the Amazon who had informed on the poor beggar of a spy, don’t you see. Then the other fellow, the big black man, catches hold of him. ‘Come along to the beach,’ he says to him. ‘Come along, come along ; I am going to chop off your head !’”

“And did he go ?” inquired the sceptical Etcheverry—who was from Biarritz, where the sailors are beginning to acquire more modern ideas.

“Did he go ? of course he did ! Because he couldn’t help himself, don’t you see ; the moment he was caught playing the spy he knew it was all up with him. He didn’t feel any too good over it, all the same, as you may suppose.”

And the Breton continued to reel off his yarn of mystery and darkness :

“The billy-goat was the only living soul

on board the brig, and as she was carrying a cargo of barley in bulk, he had had plenty to eat. If I were to try to tell you how fat he was you wouldn't believe me——”

“So he goes to work and binds the dirty spy's hands behind his back,” Turubeta continued, “that way, with a rope of straw, such as they use to fasten their horses with in that beastly country, and makes him get down on his knees upon the sand, and begins to hack away at the back of his neck with his old cheese-toaster. But now that it was fairly begun, the other fellow didn't want any more of it—oh, boys, you ought to have heard the fuss he made! And the Amazon grinned and showed her white teeth—see, like that,—to show how glad she was, I suppose. Well, you may believe me or not, just as you choose, but his regulation sabre was so dull that he could not do the job with it, and in order to finish the business he had to go down into his pocket and bring out a cheap little

knife that I myself had given him, and for which I paid old Mother Virginie, in the bazaar at Goree, ten sous when it was new."

While the listeners were making merry over this original method of executing a death sentence their neighbors, the Bretons, were brooding reflectively over the history of the abandoned brig and the black goat, and Jean, who, toward the conclusion of the two narratives, had bent his ear alternately to left and right to listen, smiled indulgently at the childish credulity of his shipmates; the sprightly song "Old Neptune" also inspired him with some of its irresistible, contagious gayety. He had never felt himself so completely and thoroughly a sailor as he did that evening. His anxieties for the future, which had been growing less troublesome with each succeeding day, now vanished entirely in the sensation of well-being and repose experienced by his weary body. He yielded himself up to the purely animal delight of

living and breathing, on that pleasant evening, of feeling his muscles so hard and supple under his loosely fitting garments. He stretched himself at full length on the snow-white planks, which were his most frequent bed, and made a pillow of the man who chanced to be next to him, a neighborly courtesy to which no sailorman objects.

It was of all the twenty-four the enchanting hour on those summer seas where the gentle trade winds blow. For a moment he was conscious of the tall edifice of snowy canvas towering above his head and oscillating with a regular rhythmic movement upon the deep blue of the heavens; then the bright constellations of the southern sky blazed forth between the sails and rigging, now growing more shadowy and indistinct, and seemed to be playing a solemn game of hide and seek, vanishing at uniform intervals and reappearing, then hiding again, to commence afresh their stately

evolutions in unison with the easy rolling of the vessel. At last they faded from his sight, and beneficent slumber, bearer of oblivion and peace, descended and sealed his eyes.

XXV

THE succeeding month of May beheld our sailor boy in Quebec, where his ship was unexpectedly obliged to make a long stop for repairs. There was a retired street in one of the faubourgs of the city which had long ceased to have the attraction of novelty for him, and from a small house in this street he was seen to emerge every evening in company with a golden-haired lassie, who was his own affianced bride; frank and fearless in manner, her long bright hair floating down upon her shoulders, well-dressed and ladylike in appearance, she would lead him forth by paths among the tender young green grass, and stroll, unattended save by him, till nightfall.

It had come about very quickly, that betrothal, almost in a day. A Frenchman,

a worthy sort of person in moderate circumstances, a descendant of the old Canadian settlers, being on board the *Résolue* one day, had stopped for a while and watched Jean at his duty, then suddenly, to the other's astonishment, had blurted out: "Come and see me; I have three daughters; you shall select which one of them you will, and she shall be your wife." And that was the way he made the girl's acquaintance.

To tell the truth, he had never by word of mouth announced a preference for one of the three sisters over the other two, but it was evident enough that pretty Mar' was the object of his choice, and in their capacity of plighted lovers they went together when and where they pleased, and no one had a word to say against it. While the vessel was undergoing repairs, his time was his own pretty much every evening; hence he was at liberty to go and woo his Marie when he would, in that house where the parents seldom showed their faces, and

where the two other girls treated him as if he had already been their brother.

The whole affair seemed to him to have a fantastic air of improbability about it, as had the spring, which to him was no spring at all, and it made him smile to see Mar' in those long, cold evenings, wearing muslin dresses and crowning her glorious golden mane with a straw hat. That sudden engagement, those uncertain evenings of May, appeared to him equally unstable, equally liable to change and pass away like all things terrestrial.

Astonished, and it must be confessed, considerably amused at the beginning, at a later period unwilling to wound the susceptibilities of his new friends, who, if eccentric, were kind-hearted and worthy people, he let the days run on without saying anything to intimate his non-acceptance of the old man's proposal—Marie's fresh, pink cheeks, and pretty face meanwhile contriving to find fresh favor in his eyes with each succeeding day.

“Let the corvette go back to France,” the father said, “and stay with us. We can send and bring your mother over, you know. I have been wishing all along that I might have a Frenchman for a son-in-law, an active, industrious young man, and above all, dark-complexioned—because my daughters are too fair, and my wife has two sisters who are albinos. Now you understand me.” Then he went on to disclose his plans for the future, and explain the nature of the business (an open air occupation of great promise) that he proposed to share with the husband of his daughter.

But when the day came for them to sail Jean stuck by his ship. What, desert the flag, renounce all hope of ever again beholding the shores of France, the little house at Antibes, the garden of Carigou—he would rather have lain down and died at once ! And then there was so little in that land of America that appealed to his soul of poet and lover of the Orient, that

took pleasure in nothing save old ruins, the immutable, the dead past.

His heart was a little heavy, however, while they were getting aboard the anchor to the sound of a cheerful refrain. He regretted to leave that Marie, with her golden hair that had so often swept his face, blown by the wind; perhaps he regretted more the parcels of his existence, the crumbs of love, that he had left by the roadside, among the grass, during their walks at eventide.

He sailed away, telling himself that he would write soon, that he would certainly return, would marry her, perhaps. But he was so constituted that with the exception of his mother and his childish memories of Provence, there was nothing that had power to stir his feelings or readily awaken his affections. Emotion slipped from off him, so to speak, and found no chink or cranny by which to penetrate his inner nature through its envelope of careless unconcern.

XXVI

“MOTHER, let me have just one look at the little brown hat I wore that Easter Sunday.”

The words were spoken in an accent that recalled Antibes, and with a comical imitation of the lisping utterance of a little child, that he assumed occasionally to amuse his mother and bring a smile to her lips. She opened the press where the relics were kept, took from it a bandbox of antiquated shape, and held up for his inspection the hat that was inside, carefully wrapped in gauze.

Jean had reached home that same day from his cruise on board the *Résolue*, and this evocation of ancient memories constituted one of the melancholy pleasures of his return. The little cambric shirt, the grand-

father's coat and cane were also brought out and looked at, and then the poor, paltry objects were carefully laid away again. .

Afterward she showed him the various alterations and improvements she had made, in his chamber particularly; there was a knitted counterpane for his bed, the work of her hands during the long winter evenings, when her tired eyes were unable longer to see the stitches and she had to lay aside her embroidery work for the officers. "I grant you it looks a good deal like the spreads poor people use," she said, "but what would you have, my son? it is useful, it is warm, and when I am gone you will remember it was your mother made it."

To him everything appeared very nice, very pretty; after the Spartan simplicity that prevailed on shipboard, the neatly kept little apartment, with its freshly ironed muslin curtains, white as the driven snow, had an air almost of luxury. And yet, on this, his day of home-coming, the sky was

overcast and sombre ; a pelting, relentless summer rain storm, cold as winter, was inundating Brest, shedding its gloom on everything.

She looked admiringly on him, her boy, in the full splendor of his one-and-twenty years, so supple and tall of stature, with broad, square shoulders, the pure profile and warm complexion set in a frame of soft black beard. But what she admired and loved most of all was his great eyes, with their dark Arab brows and lashes, soft as velvet, eyes in which, when turned affectionately on her, she could read the candid smile of childhood.

He stood well with his superiors, moreover, having acquired their favor by his close attention to his duties, and came home wearing on his sleeves the stripes of quartermaster, which are not given in the navy except for good and sufficient reason. On board ship the promptness of his intelligence, his decision, his self-control and forceful manner had secured appreciation,

and in addition to these seamanlike qualities his officers, under his air of silent reserve, had noted in him an unusual superiority in matters outside of his calling, and had never failed to treat him with special consideration.

Since leaving Quebec the *Résolue* had twice touched at foreign ports, and still Jean had not written to Marie. At odd moments he felt a sensation of regret, his conscience pricked him for the sorrow he had brought to her, and on the day he landed he made an inward vow that on the morrow, without fail, the importunate letter should be dispatched for Canada. Even were the fair one not tenderly beloved, to refrain from writing was quite consistent with the sailor habits and turn of mind to which Jean was becoming constantly more and more subjected ; but in addition to that he was also specially afflicted by nature with that particular inertia, the inertia of letter writing, than which there is nothing more difficult to overcome.

And the morrow came and went, and many a morrow after it; the image of the fair young girl gradually became less distinct and faded from his memory; he never wrote to her.

XXVII

ON a fine evening in August of that same year, Jean and his mother were seated at their window, their elbows resting on the red cushion that covered the broad ledge of granite. There had been a great storm, a long and bitter disagreement between the pair ; the first, it is true, since the evil days of long ago. But now the storm had subsided ; all was forgotten and forgiven, and they were at one again.

As his compulsory period of apprenticeship was drawing to a close, it was his mother's wish that he should adopt the only sensible course, which was, that he should remain there in Brest and take a course in hydrography ; it was her belief that by giving his whole mind and attention to his studies he might obtain his

master's certificate the following year and secure employment as an officer with some of the great steamship lines—if in the Mediterranean trade so much the better—and then their future would be clear before them.

But to Jean, who during the entire cruise had not opened a book on mathematics and had devoted all his attention to the more practical side of his profession, it seemed that what algebra and trigonometry remained to him subsisted in his head in the condition of a badly snarled skein, to disentangle which would be beyond his power, and, with a feeling of childish terror, he imagined that to attempt to master those abstractions would be a labor no less arduous than those that Hercules inflicted on himself. He had not been economical and saved his money, either, while visiting those American ports, so that his mother's embroidery needle would have to earn subsistence for them both, and he, not over well pleased with himself, did not take

kindly to the idea of living, at the age of twenty-one, on the product of her labor.

Never an easy subject to guide and influence, even when a boy, notwithstanding his generous, warm-hearted disposition, he now became obstinate and sullen, with eyes no longer the same; with the curt, harsh voice of the old evil days when his mother addressed to him an ill-timed reproach, one of those well-meant but inopportune reproaches that for a time cause the heart to close impenetrably.

Then he opposed his will to hers with silent stubbornness, for he was harboring another project of his own, which tempted him by the ease with which it might be carried into execution, and would deliver him from the dreaded mathematical course: to re-enlist in the navy! Moreover, the sailor's life had a strong hold on his imagination, by reason of that inexplicable charm of which so many young men have felt the influence.

And now the project was an accom-

plished fact ; he had signed his liberty away the day before, irrevocably ; had concluded a pact that bound him to wear the blue shirt for another five years.

When he awoke that morning, however, and with returning consciousness the irreparableness of what he had done dawned on his mind, he reproached himself for his own folly, and was oppressed by a bitter presentiment of the evil that was to result from it. He announced the news to his mother while they were eating their silent breakfast, treating the matter as something quite in the ordinary, in a few brief, careless words. She, who had vaguely suspected the truth, looked at him without saying a word, without any expression of surprise, with mournful eyes to which the tears came welling ; then he, vanquished in turn, took her in his arms and their difference was no more. They remained thus for a long time, pressed to each other's bosom in a close embrace of tenderness and forgiveness, those two forsaken ones, who

were yet more cast down by this new outlook for the future. "But how, how could I have done otherwise?" he said to her, very gently, in a tone of kind reproach—and he almost succeeded in persuading her that he was right. As he was all in all to her, her joy and delight that he and she were reconciled once more were such that she readily yielded to his arguments, and did not discuss the issue further, or seek to restrain him.

The whole of that afternoon they devoted to reconstructing their plans on these altered foundations, exchanging views how they were to act to make the most of the new situation.

He would start on a cruise at the earliest moment possible; fortunately, his name was among the first of those available. An officer whom he had known on board the *Résolue* had promised to get a berth for him on the *Navarin*, that would sail in a couple of weeks to circumnavigate the world, a ten months' cruise. He would

apply himself and work during this long voyage, in which he would have nothing to distract him, separated as he would be from civilized life. He would be saving and come back with money in his pocket, which he could do now that he had the pay of a quartermaster. His position as a sailor would entitle him to attend the lectures of the course without paying—so many others do so—and once his examination passed successfully he would have a right to demand his discharge, and his five years would be reduced to two.

Entirely reconciled and at peace with each other, looking bravely forward to the future, they contemplated from their window the summer day drawing to an end. They pursued their train of thought in silence, allowing their eyes to wander over those mean and squálid surroundings that chance had allotted them as their horizon, and where by degrees external objects were growing dim and indistinct in the gathering dusk: the little terrace garden

underneath, the granite walls, the slated roofs, the tall chimneys boldly profiled against the golden sky. For them the uncertain future depended entirely on their strength of will and power to labor ; but they trusted and were not afraid, and more than ever, now that that evil crisis was gone by which had caused them both to suffer so and in which for a brief moment she had had a glimpse of the supreme ill, the miserable void arising from the feeling that she could not trust him.

XXVIII

IT seemed as if Jean's life was doomed to be dogged by an unrelenting fatality; unwise decisions, hopes unrealized, plans that came to naught: these were the things that fate appeared to have in store for him. He did not sail on that cruise around the world; the *Navarin's* complement was filled without him. Other seamen of his grade had unexpectedly returned from sea, and in accordance with certain inflexible regulations of the service had been placed at the head of the available list, where no one ever thinks of yielding his place. He spent the winter at Brest with his mother.

Thanks to the increased pay afforded by his higher rank, they were able to command a few more comforts for themselves. He spent nothing on himself except what was actually necessary, and on Sundays his

mother found herself enabled to appear with him in the streets attired with some approach to her former elegance.

Sometimes he would bring a friend or two home with him; not those honest, rough and ready young men of the coast, be it understood, in whose society he found such pleasure, but youths of good family, who, for one reason or another, had entered the navy and, like himself, were men of politeness and refinement fallen from their proper sphere. He even invited them to dine with him occasionally in the little dining-room, where evidences of increased prosperity were visible, where the handsome vases that they had brought from Antibes were filled with flowers for the first time since the flight into exile, and on these occasions he manifested much anxiety that the repast should be served in conformity with the usages of good society, and that his mother should present the appearance of a lady. He would apologize for the extreme modesty of the service, and

eagerly embraced every opportunity to direct the conversation upon the topic of their past, as is frequently the way with people who have seen better days, having a good deal to say of their mansion at Antibes and the silver plate that they had been forced to sell, drawing the long bow a little, and exaggerating the state in which they had lived in other days.

The friend whom he thought most of was a true-hearted and timid youth named Morel, son of a Protestant minister in central France, whom dreams of travel and a longing to behold the sea had attracted from his home; a wretched sailor, moreover, as he could not well help being aware of, from the attentions that were constantly being bestowed on him by the terrible sergeant at arms.

Jean had at first taken him under his protecting wing out of sheer pity, and afterward had become attached to him. And it was not long before *he* was greatly surprised at discovering in this good-natured

protector, thorough-paced sailor that he was, a refinement of which he had not deemed him capable, and conceptions of the vanished Orient, and light, and death, more mysterious and deeper and wider even than his own. Owing to their many points of similarity, and to the many more of divergence, these two men, who were liable at any moment to be ordered away to the opposite ends of the earth and never behold each other's face again, had incontinently conceived a mutual liking.

In the same street where Jean's apartments were, this Morel had a little chamber for which he paid ten francs a month, where he stowed away his books, his only earthly treasure, as he bought them, and whither he retired to pore over them. In this little library, the books in which had been selected with great care, Jean, whose approval was always reserved for the quintessence, would rummage somewhat scornfully; and it amused Morel to see this friend of his, so little a man of letters, open

a volume, skim over two or three pages, and say in a tone that admitted no contradiction: "No, none of that for me." "But why?" the pale and studious young man would ask. "Well—how am I to explain my meaning—that book says nothing to me, that's all." And each time he was right; the book might be a work of erudition and well written, but it had no informing soul, or, if it had, a very small one. The books were few in number, moreover, that reached the level and met the requirements of his misty, nebulous ideal, to which he himself would have been puzzled to give definite form and shape.

The romance of contemporaneous manners, even the very best, had no interest for him, because his simplicity had never fathomed the complications of the life of the present day; it either soared high aloft or else diverted itself with the veriest trifles. Thus, to explain, he could read with pleasure three times in succession a chapter of the *Apocalypse*, or Flaubert's "Temptation

of Saint Anthony," or some sombre antediluvian vision of Rosny's; this was the kind of mental pabulum he craved, or else, when he desired relaxation for his mind, the stupid buffooneries and inane folly of the *Chat-Noir*.

On the whole Morel's acquaintance seemed to exert an unlooked-for influence on him, teaching him to view matters in a broader and more practical light, for he had never read so much as he did in his friend's company during those long winter evenings.

Now and then, however, he would break away from his books and the honest fireside to run after women. On such occasions he would take almost as much pains to hide his folly from the sedate Morel, who believed him to be at his mother's, as from his mother, who thought he was at Morel's. He got out of the scrape as best he could when detected, employing the lies of a schoolboy, the stratagems of a red Indian—which were successful, sometimes.

XXIX

As winter was drawing to a close and his twenty-second birthday was approaching, he received orders to hold himself in readiness for a cruise, which, in his forgetful indifference, he had ceased to desire. He was to be forwarded with a detachment to another port, whence he was to proceed to Dakar and there, for eighteen months, form one of the crew of a gunboat on the Senegal station.

He knew something of Dakar, the *Résolue* having put in there once, and the mention only of the name Senegal was sufficient to bring before him visions of dreary sandy wastes, of languorous evenings, and the sun's blood-red disk, enlarged to preternatural size, sinking into the broad bosom of the desert. So, then, he was

about to penetrate to the heart of the country of the Blacks, by the mighty river that serves as a path for Europeans. The thought of it all had a strange attraction for him, especially the neighborhood of the great Saharian desert, the impenetrable marches of the Moors.

By a special favor, and one that is seldom granted, he was accorded his liberty on parole for the last evening he was to spend on shore; the detachment would pass beneath his window at midnight on its way to the railway station, when he was to hasten down and join it upon a signal given by the whistle of the commander.

The clergyman's son, his faithful friend, was invited to share his farewell dinner. On the floor, beside his seat at table, lay the white duck sack containing his clothing and effects, packed and closed, ready to be slung from his shoulder. Mother, son and guest felt the influence of that profound oppression which prevails at the instant of some decisive crisis, as when death is im-

minent, or a parting that may be final ; the three ate little, and in almost unbroken silence.

Jean saw that his mother had placed her hat and cloak where she could reach them easily, preparatory to going out, and he divined her intention. "No, mamma, you must not go to the station," he said to her very gently, taking in his the hand that lay beside him on the table-cloth. And in answer to her tearful look of disappointment, that seemed to ask humbly why : "Well, the others will be there, you see. No, don't go ; I would rather give you my farewell kiss here. Morel can go with me if he feels inclined."

After dinner they seated themselves before the fire expectantly, talking very little, their conversation broken by long intervals of silence, the two sailors smoking cigarettes, the mother seated beside her boy, and holding one of his hands in both her own.

"Mother dear, before I go show me

those things—you know what I mean, the things that are so dear to us—the coat, the cane, everything—I wish to look on them once more.” And when she hesitated and glanced at the stranger who was sitting there: “What! on Morel’s account? It matters not to me, his being here. He will understand.”

Then she produced them, one after another, the precious relics he had called for, and spread them before him on the table. He sat for a long time contemplating them in rapt silence, with bowed head, and the smoke of the fragrant tobacco of the East came from his lips at regular intervals in thin blue jets and rose in spirals on the air. And as they were removed and vanished from his sight, enveloped anew in their muslin cerements, he experienced that same impression of hopeless parting, that sensation of “nevermore,” that had visited him that evening when for the last time he closed behind him the garden-gate of Carigou.

Suddenly, through the half-open window, there came a dull, distant sound, disturbing the silence of the slumbering street, the cadenced tramp of feet upon the stones; then the shrill note of a boatswain's whistle sounded in their ears. What, so soon! Could it be the detachment? The clock must be slow, then; they had not dreamed it was so late. Jean, in a half-dazed condition, folded his mother in his arms, throwing all his heart and soul into that last embrace, then, slinging his sack across his shoulder and followed by Morel, hurried down the granite staircase four steps at a time.

Holding a lamp to light his steps, numb and chilled with grief, speechless, she watched him as he hastened down the stairs, then flew to the window and threw it wide for another glimpse of him in the street below; but all she saw was a confused group of men moving away, an indistinct black mass receding in the darkness under a drizzle of cold rain. He, on the other

hand, turning and looking up, could discern her very plainly where she stood, her form outlined like a picture in the frame of the illuminated window. When the black mass was lost to sight and the tramp of feet sounded faint in the distance, she closed the sash—and was alone. Dry-eyed, benumbed and stupefied, trembling in every limb and her forehead bedewed with a cold perspiration, with a sensation unknown to her hitherto, that none of Jean's other departures had caused her, of utter loneliness and desolation, she sank upon a chair before the expiring fire, and mechanically took from the stone slab of the mantel in her tremulous fingers a cigarette, his last cigarette, that even now was exhaling its parting breath.

XXX

ON the day of his arrival at the port to which he had been dispatched he was informed that another quartermaster had returned to barracks the day before, with a claim that took precedence over his, and was to have his position on the vessel stationed off Senegal.

It is in this way that many sailors' lives are passed in traveling on bootless errands. Dispatched in this direction and in that, like bales of merchandise, and, for the most part, desiring nothing so much as active service at sea, they are frequently condemned to long periods of inactivity at the naval stations, where, at evening, they seem to enjoy themselves so well.

Ended, or at least put off indefinitely, were his anticipations of a protracted cruise.

His place in the list of those available for duty assigned him a position in the "Reserve"—which consists of a number of unarmed vessels that lie inactive, moored to the dock at navy yards, for indefinite periods of time. For him, it was as if he had been stranded in some strange and unlooked-for way in this little slow and lifeless town, with its rows of white houses, so trim and uniform, where the broad and unfrequented avenues ended in the old verdurous ramparts. In this tranquil seaport, surrounded by wide grass-grown plains, strange as it may seem, there was no view of the sea obtainable, and were it not for the sailors who enlivened the streets at evening with their singing, one might have thought himself in one of the central provinces. This new description of banishment, which sentenced him to live on shore, and for a space of time that seemed to him unwarrantably long, produced in him a sensation of depressing melancholy; he had not reckoned on being exiled to a place so

near his mother, and never had he experienced a feeling of such solitariness as he did now.

And then he realized more fully than he had ever done before the low position that the common sailor occupies in the social scale, for there were certain degrading offices that until now he had not been called on to perform. Among all the men collected on this "Reserve," there was not one fit for him to associate with as a companion. The best he could do was to form loose ties with two or three young fellows, cottagers by birth and very young and simple-minded, with whom, thanks to their common fund of childlike gayety, he managed to pass an hour occasionally, but to whom he was infinitely superior in intelligence and aspiration.

Ever abounding in good intentions, he said to himself that he would endeavor to secure an exchange and leave the station ; that meanwhile he would live a virtuous and sober life, saving his money and sleep-

ing of nights in his hammock, although he found the sparsely populated ship and the deserted arsenal a very lonesome and melancholy domicile.

A tall, straight, well-built young fellow of twenty-two, with great, gentle eyes, with silky black beard, he might be seen strolling in the streets at evening, with leisurely step and lofty manner, his bronzed throat and the beginning of his mighty shoulders revealed beneath the ample turned-back collar of his blue shirt. With a fine assumption of indifference he shot careless glances at the girls and maidens as they passed, of whom none, however, seemed to rise to the height of his ideal, and he never failed at nightfall, before the firing of the sunset gun, to be within the gates of the arsenal, which closed and made him a prisoner until the dawning of another day.

XXXI

BUT on a certain Sunday evening, as he was strolling without definite aim or object, alone, as was his unvarying habit, and with his assumed air of gravity, he entered the courtyard of the railway station to witness the arrival of the train and amuse himself by scrutinizing the faces of the by-passers —and perhaps also, although he did not admit the impeachment to himself, with an embryonic intention of inaugurating a flirtation, in the pleasant March twilight, when the days had already commenced to lengthen and be more vernal.

A bustling scene of Sunday life and gayety presented itself to his inspection, a crowd of worthy people returning from the country. He could not help smiling at the quaint head gear of some among the women.

“ You haven’t lost the little satchel, Madeleine, I hope? ” inquired, in a tone that its tragic anxiety made comical, a good woman wearing a fringed mantilla, plainly a careful mother and housewife.

He looked about him for the girl who was called Madeleine, with a feeling of amusement that he should know her name before he had ever seen her. She had passed on, and was walking away with a rapid step, but turned to show that she had the little leather bag in her possession, and in the second’s space that was granted him the little that Jean could see of her regular profile seemed to him exquisite. And then, as the surging wave of passengers streamed out through the archway and spread over the broad avenue, he followed her, enveloping her with a look that took in every detail of her dress and person. Seen, even as he saw her, from behind, she was altogether charming, supple and slender of form, with delicately molded neck and head, attired with a simple elegance that

had in it something of distinction. He cast a glance of inspection also on the parents; they appeared to be small trades-people, or perhaps mechanics in easy circumstances, a condition that rendered it out of the question for him to aspire to their acquaintance, roving sailor that he was, and ineligible for marital honors.

He hurried his steps, however, so as to pass them and secure another glimpse of the girl's face, with the desire and hope that he might be disappointed on seeing her more near at hand. When we have caught a peep at a pretty girl along our way and find she has produced an impression on us too deep for our peace of mind, it is a comfort, if, when we come to look at her later on, we find she is only an ordinary mortal; it alleviates the feeling of profound regret inspired by the thought that for us all that beauty is as if it were not.

He was now quite close to the girl whose name was Madeleine, hanging back so as to defer the moment when he should pass her,

contemplating her shell-like ear, the place where the dense growth of hair started from her neck and was carried up and coiled in a great lustrous braid like a skein of softest silk. Then, quickening his pace a bit, he opened up to view that oval line of cheek and chin, which, when it is itself regular and beautiful, rarely fails to be an index to the remainder of the features. At last he made up his mind that he would pass her, and did so, with head erect, eying her from top to toe, and encountering her look, which sank, but not too quickly, before his.

And his mind was even yet more ill at ease, for alas, she was delicious ! Great warm brown eyes, very deeply set in their orbits and rather sombre, with a slightly frowning expression, as if behind them there were will and intellect. A straight profile ; the chin a little prominent, but irreproachably pure in outline. A rare characteristic of that face, and one that attracted attention to it at first sight, was

its absolute and entire simplicity of line and color. The features seemed to have been molded by a sober and self-reliant hand, whose aim it was to express nobility of form with the smallest possible amount of detail. The curves, so gentle, yet so firmly drawn, of cheek and neck, appeared to have been produced at a single stroke, complete in all their grace and beauty, rendering the labor of retouching superfluous. The whole had then been left of a uniformly pale shade of pink hydrangea, which was the color of the translucent clay from which that fair face was molded. The pale gold of the hair, moreover, approaching flaxen, completed the harmony of subdued tints, than which nothing could be more distinguished. And the startling, almost unnatural, tranquillity of the *ensemble* gave an added life and lustre to the brown eyes, which, youthful and ardent, shone from their deep setting beneath the thick brows contracted in an involuntary frown.

He relaxed his speed again, that she might pass him in turn and enable him to secure another view. The relatives, also, were this time subjected to a closer examination than before: they were father, mother, and an elderly lady, probably an aunt; cheerful, wholesome-looking bodies, who might have been good-looking in their time. And what a simple air of honesty there was about them! He hesitated to follow them, with a sensation of remorse, as if his pursuit might do her harm.

He continued his espionage, but more prudently, keeping a good distance between them and cloaking himself in the shadows of the gathering darkness, to the end that he might at least learn where they lived, and not lose trace entirely of pretty Madeleine.

When he had taken note of the unpretentious little house within which they entered (it was in the upper town and faced a small garden), he made his way down again toward the central quarters,

and from there to the localities where the jolly mariner disports himself at evening. It was too late to think of returning to quarters; the gates of the arsenal were closed by that time, so, to change the current of his thoughts, he entered a music hall, where facile conquests were obtainable.

But he was surprised when he became aware the following morning that that pretty colorless face and those ardent young eyes had filched from him some portion of his being. On account of that girl, whom he had seen but for a fleeting moment, he had lost his sense of isolation in that strange seaport; the dead-alive little town was less oppressively tranquil, the old ramparts had not so much the aspect of a prison. It was the delicious mirage of love, which transforms all the present and obliterates all the past.

At nightfall, as soon as he was free, he bent his steps toward her house again, to see if fortune would favor him with another glimpse of her.

And behold, at that very moment she came hastening up, as if in answer to his summons. He trembled as he recognized her. She was coming home alone, apparently in something of a hurry, carrying in her hand the little leather satchel that had been the innocent cause of so much mischief. She was neatly gloved, and her attire, more simple even than it had been the day before, had an indescribable air of appropriateness and gentility.

She was coming home from work, that was plain enough; therefore she was nothing more than a little working-girl, doubtless returning unaccompanied to the paternal fireside every evening at the same hour—which would tend greatly to facilitate matters. By her look, which was averted quicker than he could have desired, he saw that she had remarked him the day before, and was troubled at his appearing again in her path.

All his good resolutions of confining

himself to the ship and saving his money were scattered to the winds. That very evening he went into the town and hired for himself a small chamber in a sailor's boarding-house, over a *café* that had not many patrons, in a linden-shaded street adjacent to the navy yard. To silence the voice of conscience he said to himself that he would bring his text-books and work there nights ; it would be so much more convenient for him than on those old ships, where he got so little light from the oil-lamps in their rusty iron gratings.

It was an entirely new experience for him to be living in this way, having a room on shore all to himself and being his own master, just like a young civilian, and by fits and starts he was alternately either melancholy or pleased as a little child over the sudden change. He thought constantly of her, delighted to have found out that her name was Madeleine, which somehow seemed to bring him a little nearer to her.

XXXII

Two days later, just as she was leaving the dressmaker's establishment where she was employed, a small boy, in whose appearance there was nothing to arouse distrust, handed her the following missive from him :

MISS MADELEINE :

Someone whom you have already seen three times, and whose name is Jean, will meet you presently at the spot where he saw you last evening. He begs you will permit him to speak to you, if only for an instant, provided there is no one passing.

JEAN.

And now he was waiting in the gloaming, in a retired street of venerable white houses, the sidewalk bordered on one side by a row of lindens and on the other by garden walls, the route by which she hab-

itually returned to the paternal dwelling. It was really a most unusual display of ceremony for him, accustomed as he was to easy successes among that class of little girls who trip home at night alone and unattended, to write that letter; but then this Madeleine was so little like the others, so little like, that he did not even know what he was going to ask of her or say to her. And he paced his beat, so many steps this way, so many that, or leaned with his back against the trunks of the lindens, impatient for her to come, and at the same time agitated by an emotion that was closely akin to terror at the thought of seeing her turn the corner of the street.

She, even before she opened the note—the first that anyone had ever presumed to write to her—felt instinctively that it was from him. The poor child had had a lonely life of it. Of a proud and imaginative nature, she had been brought up in the austerity of a Protestant household, and until that day had looked with scorn on

those among her companions of the shop who suffered the attentions of "beaux"; and now here she was, sanctioning a proceeding that was so entirely novel to her without astonishment or anger—because that proceeding came from him. In those three days Jean's good looks and handsome eyes had occupied a commanding place in her imagination. She was disturbed in mind, with a disturbance to which until then she had been a stranger, a vertigo that made men, trees and houses reel and dance before her eyes—and all the more because the audacious letter that had worked the spell had been given her quite near the place of meeting, affording her no time to reflect, to change her route, to make up her mind to anything. And continuing on mechanically in the road to which she was accustomed, her ears ringing, her knees weakening under her, she soon came, as if transported thither against her will, to the corner of the street—and turned into the lonely lane, between the

garden walls—and beheld him, *him*, a dozen steps away, advancing to meet her.

To hear for the first time the sound of a woman's voice whom one has come to love for her face and outward appearance is a sensation that is capable of causing either delight or disappointment. When, before he had uttered a word, she began to speak, Jean listened with rapture to Madeleine's voice, which was calm and deliberate, pitched on a low key, very grave and very youthful, like the voice of a growing boy that has not yet assumed its definite tonality.

“Oh, sir ! Can it be possible—here in the public street, and in your sailor's dress !——”

“In sailor's dress ! Ah, true ; I had not thought of it. But if I return to-morrow in civilian attire, will you speak to me ? Will you, truly ? Come, now, give me your promise for to-morrow.”

“Well, yes ; I will,” she replied, raising her brown eyes, which encountered the

blue eyes in their setting of black velvet brows. They smiled on her, the blue eyes, with a glad look of gratitude, childishly soft and gentle in the masculine face, with a dash of sauciness, and the protecting expression of a great nobleman.

"That is a bargain, then," Jean gayly answered. "Good-night, Miss Madeleine." He doffed his cap to her, bowing slightly with a charmingly graceful air, and went his way with a firm and rapid step, skimming over the pavement and scarce able to restrain his desire to run and jump, his mind lightened of a great load, no longer fearing to be repulsed by that grave-faced young creature. He loved her now ten times more than he had done before, and thought ecstatically of what the morrow had in store for him.

XXXIII

“My father? He was a quartermaster’s mate in the navy. But he is superannuated now,” said, on another evening, in the solitude of the same lindens, the same grave young voice.

“And your mother—your mother is still living?”

“Oh, yes; and there is also Aunt Mélanie, who makes her home with us. That evening, when we were returning from the station, she was behind me, wearing a gray hat. Don’t you remember?” (He always addressed her as if she were a child, but with the most perfect respect, with never a word of love.)

After a moment’s silence she went on in a troubled, half-frightened way, casting down her eyes and touching in turn with the toe of her shoe, as if it were a task she

had allotted herself, each of the cobblestones that raised their heads among the dusty, sickly grass :

“I saw in the beginning that you were not a common sailor like the rest of them, Monsieur Jean.”

“*Mon Dieu*, in fact—well, perhaps I am not. But I am none the better for that, I assure you.” Shrouding himself in an air of mystery, he parried in this manner every indirect attempt to question him in relation to his past, with a few careless words of bravado. Then her imagination would construct a story such as we read in romances ; he was some prodigal son, some scion of an illustrious family constrained to silence.

XXXIV

THINGS had now reached such a pass that they walked together regularly every evening—over a short course covering fifty or sixty *métres*, never more—in the upper portion of that same street, where there were no windows and no by-passers, which lay slumberously silent between the old whitewashed garden walls. The lindens that arched the lane had budded and bloomed, and now were constructing above the lover's heads a dome of verdure ; the evenings were becoming longer, longer and brighter, as Time in his inexorable flight hurried them on toward summer. And April was advancing with a rapidity that they would have been glad could they have checked.

But April was not propitious to their

loves, the future of which seemed so uncertain, and which contrived to vegetate among those contracted and depressing surroundings, and never aired themselves except along that narrow footpath of white flagstones margined with green grass. The heavens, too, were frowningly sombre over their heads, closing in on them like the contracted terrestrial scene, constantly filled with gray clouds whence the rain drops came patterning down on the young leaves.

They might walk as slowly as they would, even under the pelting of such a shower as drives ordinary mortals, not lovers, to seek shelter; the end of the street was reached all too soon, putting an end to their rather incoherent conversation, where intervals of silence so abounded. It is hard to explain how much of the ephemeral seemed to be mingled with the very essence of their love; vague menaces of ending, and of death, and of oblivion, were hovering in the air above them.

Jean, accustomed as he was to the gayer

springtimes of his bright land of Provence, was disagreeably impressed by this chill, shivering April, devoid of sunshine, by this luxuriant vegetation, so fresh and green, beneath the inky sky, whither the neighboring ocean dispatched its breezes and great black clouds. His sojourn in the little stagnant town had certain aspects of tranquillity that reminded him of that time he had spent at Rhodes, and of the evenings when there came down the hills to meet him, at the same twilight hour and by paths equally white, a young Greek maiden. But now his melancholy was of a different sort, graver, and, above all, more infused with love—infinitely more infused with love. He was conscious of such an inroad on his affections as he had never known before, and with his boyish unreflectiveness he yielded to it. Whither was he tending? What object had he in view regarding that little Madeleine? He could not have told himself. As far back as their second meeting he had seen, merely

by her fearless confidence and her way of looking him straight in the face, the kind of girl she was, and that he could never hope to make her his mistress of a month. As for marrying her, he never thought of such a thing; pride of birth and early education forbade it. He never admitted that he had lost caste when he lost his fortune; he was become a common sailor, and could take the rough and the smooth as they came to him as indifferently as the next man, could divert himself with Tom, Dick and Harry in a pothouse if he felt so inclined, but was as fastidious as the most consummate dandy at bottom as regarded everything connected with feminine elegance.

He had never even so much as touched her hand. Not pressing closely to each other's side, as is the way with lovers, but parted by a little distance, they paced their short beat along the shaded sidewalk in a constant state of watchful apprehension, with eyes and ears alert, talking in tones

scarcely above a whisper, but saying things that might have been heard of all the world ; such childish, artless prattle, so void of all rhyme or reason, the whole charm of which lay in the inflections of their voice.

And when they had come to the end of the lane, when Madeleine had given him her pretty look of farewell, he would take his post under one of the lindens to watch her as she moved away, turned the corner, and vanished in the noisy, more thickly populated street of working people where she lived. Even in the view thus afforded by her retreating figure she was altogether charming ; her slender form, the form of a child that has but just attained its growth, was erect as a poplar, with shoulders well thrown back ; in her lithe, unhurried movements was the grace arising from youth and health.

As soon as she had disappeared at the street corner he would go away, conscious that his life would be a blank to him until the following evening, and not knowing

what use to make of his time. Then he would try the effect of returning to his little chamber and sitting down to his mathematics, a little common sense and a little anxiety for the future combining to urge him to the attempt.

But who was ever known to work on a balmy evening in the lazy springtime, with dreams of love floating through his brain? Moreover there was everything to tempt him, liberty, solitude, even that civilian suit that he had purchased for her sake and that had swallowed up all his savings; that suit which facilitated his enterprises with certain befounced and befeathered beauties, less retiring than Madeleine in their disposition.

And most frequently he would go and finish up his evening in the haunts of pleasure, among the music halls.

XXXV

“IN times gone by, when father used to go to sea,” she said to him, “we were a great deal more comfortably situated than we are now, Monsieur Jean. But you know how it is in the navy as soon as one reaches the age of retirement. That is the reason why I have been working at the dressmaker’s for the past year. But that’s just how it is; I am only a little sewing girl now, and likely enough I shall continue to be one for the remainder of my days.”

The last audacious sentence was enunciated in hesitating tones—it was so like a point blank question addressed to Jean as to his intentions—and when she had finished her cheeks were rosy red, and she averted her face, waiting for an answer that did not come.

But what did come, inexorable as fate, was the rain, bent on spoiling their stolen interview; they could hear it pattering on the young leaves of the lindens with quick-coming drops, with a sound as if someone were emptying the contents of a watering pot upon a sheet of paper. Jean did not mind it; his blue jacket and bronzed neck had seen worse weather than this, and he could stand and take a wetting without flinching; but she made haste to put up her umbrella, and he, after the pretty way in which she had just confessed their poverty to him, noticed how carefully she protected her cheap little hat, that was never changed, and her gloves, that were also condemned to constant service, and which exhibited marks of artistic darning at the finger-ends. He felt within him a sudden emotion of tenderness and pity for those poor little belongings of hers, to which he saw her devote such anxious care, and that emotion served to show the extent to which she had penetrated his affections,

toward those profound regions where our impressions inscribe themselves in characters of fire, the more to make us suffer afterward.

“And I,” he said in a frank, jovial voice, “do you think that I am rich, Mademoiselle Madeleine? There was a time once, perhaps, but—— The one thing certain is that I was brought up by relatives who—who never expected to see me the sailor that I am become. But now——” Then he went on to tell to that most attentive of little listeners the story of his happy boyhood; his failure at the examination; how he had come to assume the blue jacket and bell-mouthed trousers of the sailor; the sale of the house at Antibes, and his mother now living at Brest in a poor lodging unsuited to her station, an exile from the land of her fathers.

And Madeleine carried home with her that evening a heart full to overflowing of joy and gladness. It was an easy matter for her now to give up the romantic dreams

that she had been cherishing concerning her friend's past life ; she felt that he was brought so much more close to her ! The possibility, the radiant possibility, appeared to her for the first time that she might be his wife, with the enchanting prospect of seeing him installed for all time at the domestic hearth and board, and also in a cheerful bedroom on the first floor, facing the street, that Aunt Mélanie had promised ever so long ago to furnish against the time there should be a young couple ready to take possession of it. And her conscience ceased to trouble her, moreover, her remorseful feelings, little puritan that she was, now that there was a prospect that all would be made straight in an honest, decent manner.

He had told his story in one of those unreflecting moments that were so characteristic of the man, and not more than on the day before, or on any other day, had the idea of marrying her crossed his mind when he took leave of her with a pleasant

smile and these lightly uttered words: "A sailor and a sewing girl—we can give each other the right hand of friendship, you see, Mademoiselle Madeleine."

Meanwhile his aimless attachment for this strange little comrade, so pleasant an object for the eye to rest on, continued to wax and grow within him, all the time assuming a character of chaste tranquillity, almost of immateriality. When perfect respect exists, conjointly with the certain assurance of insuperable obstacles, the love of the senses may go on living and growing, as his did, beneath the love of the soul, in a sort of dull slumber, until a something, or a nothing, happens to arouse it: a touch of the hand, a dangerous thought, a half-formed hope.

And so they came to love each other with a tenderness that was as pure and holy on the one side as on the other. She, untaught and ignorant in matters of the heart and reading her Bible each night before retiring; doomed yet for a few pale springs

like this to waste to no purpose her bright young grace and beauty, then to grow old, and fade and wither in the unvarying dreary monotony of those same streets, imprisoned between those unchanging walls. He, so young, yet already surfeited with kisses and caresses; for dwelling place having the wide world before him where to choose; liable to be called away at any moment, to-morrow, perhaps, never to return, and to leave his bones in distant seas.

XXXVI

APRIL had passed and May was coming in, veiled like its predecessor in fog and mist, sombre and sunless, with heavy winds from the sea and unseasonable storms. The lonely quarter where the lovers held their trysts was redolent of the perfume of the linden blossoms, ready to fall and die.

They were old friends now, of six weeks' standing. Grown bold by reason of never seeing anyone pass that way, they held long confabs under the lindens, and he, because he thought the uniform became him, ventured to appear in sailor attire. As the twilight lengthened so did their interviews.

But it was no more than was to be expected that prying eyes and ears, of which they were blissfully ignorant, should long

since have detected their secret. At the dressmaker's shop the other girls would look at Madeleine and smile significantly, and if her parents had not yet been informed of what was going on it was greatly to be wondered at, for all the neighbors knew.

One evening Jean, who, as was his invincible custom, had been the first to reach their meeting place, perceived a man, whose light hair was beginning to be touched here and there with silver, tramping up and down the sidewalk in an expectant sort of way, who, after a moment's hesitation, came forward with an evident intention of addressing him. He was erect and martial in bearing, and his blue cloth frock, buttoned to the chin, was of the regulation naval cut; manifestly some retired petty officer, who had converted his old uniform coat into civilian attire by cutting off the brass buttons. Jean had a vague recollection of the face for having seen it one Sunday in the courtyard of the station. But in any

event, he would have recognized the frowning brows and long, reddish-brown eyes, set as in a cavern under the beetling projection of the forehead, that the old mariner had transmitted to his daughter, with something, it may be, of his character and temperament. They looked each other squarely in the face, each understanding in an instant who the other was.

“Ah, it is you!” said the man in an unpleasant, gruff voice from between his tight-shut teeth.

Jean’s only answer was to raise his hand to his cap in salute; he was disarmed, because he was her father and had eyes like hers, and his feeling toward him was almost one of filial submission.

“Be off with you!” the man continued, with the same gruff, dictatorial manner, as if he were on shipboard giving orders to his men, but also with a certain indescribable softness that rose suddenly to his eyes, “take yourself off! It is I who will see her home this evening.”

And Jean took himself off, having first doffed his cap and saluted respectfully. There had been no spark of hatred elicited from the meeting of their glances, from the clash of their conflicting wills.

XXXVII

THE next day all the quartermasters of the reserves were notified by a sergeant at arms that their presence was required at the office of the commander of the yard.

All the men had a pretty shrewd idea of what was in the wind: one of them was wanted to go as a volunteer to the extreme East, and there serve for a year or two on board a small gunboat on one of the stagnant, sluggish rivers of that inhospitable country, where the climate is almost certain death.

Anxious considerations pressed on Jean's mind. There could be nothing better than this expedition to serve his plans: he might go out there and complete his term of enlistment, saving up his pay meanwhile to enable him to spend a year at Brest afterward and study for his master's examin-

ation. He said to himself that it was his duty to go.

But at that juncture Madeleine's pale face rose before his mental vision, causing him such a feeling of deep distress that he paused, recoiling at the thought of taking such a grave and decisive step, waiting, and hoping that someone else would speak.

Everyone was silent. A silence of diffidence, dashed with the sense of the danger there was in the enterprise. In addition to which it may be said that sailors never respond when applied to indirectly and in a body.

"I will go, Captain," he finally said, tremblingly and in a very low voice.

"You, Berny, do you want it?" replied the officer. "All right; unless the admiral orders otherwise, you may consider yourself booked for the China seas." He called him back to add these words, more terrible than all the rest: "As regards the customary leave of absence, you see, I believe—I am afraid that——" and his tone and man-

ner intimated plainly enough: you will have to do as best you can without it. "The request for the detail was marked urgent, and if I am not mistaken you will start with the detachment for Toulon early to-morrow morning."

He could feel the violent thumping of his heart, and the blood surged through his veins, causing his ears to ring. He was on the point of saying: "Oh, no; not that! Try to obtain another man; I take back my word," but dared not. In the first place, it was so manifestly his duty to go; and then there was the fatalism that, unknown to himself, lurked in his being and made him bow to the least sign from Destiny; and finally, by a peculiarity that is possessed by sailors generally, he always felt his lips close with an invincible, mute reserve in presence of his chiefs when they were strangers to him. All he did was to turn on the officer his eyes, dilated with sudden anguish, reply, "Very well, Captain!" and leave the room with the air of

a man who has been struck on the head with a club.

He was granted no leave of absence. This is a favor that is almost always extended to seamen who are ordered away on distant service, longer or shorter, as the case may be, according to the nature of the assignment; but in cases of urgency the leave may be withheld.

He was consigned to barracks that same evening, where he made up his kit and adjusted his accounts, and where he was to remain with the eight other men of the detail until the time came for their departure. They assembled in the dim twilight, under the archway of the courtyard, calling one another by name, curiously studying one another's face, those nine men who had been so suddenly caught in company at one cast of the net; who were to be co-partners in exile out there in that strange land, so far from home, and share the same dangers and fatigues. No leave was granted, no opportunity to say good-by to wives and

parents ; that was the thing that seemed to them hardest of all to bear. Nevertheless, two or three were singing, but one, a young man, was weeping bitterly.

His mother ! A feeling of deepest tenderness filled Jean's heart as he thought of her ; it was source of bitterest grief that he was unable to embrace her ; but it was for her sake that he was going away, for their future, the joint future of them both. This distant service for which he had volunteered was to be in some sort the expiatory act of his life. Then, his conscience easy on that score, he sat down and wrote her a long, affectionate letter, that did much to tranquillize his feelings.

And Madeleine ! That he should be torn from her thus, should be given no opportunity to speak to her, to send her a line by messenger, even to see her dear face once more ! Should he write to her ? But what could he write ; ask her to marry him ? His heart counseled him to the step, although she was but a poor little sewing

girl; but then by such a marriage he would be condemning himself to remain a sailor all his life; above all, he would dash to the ground his mother's cherished hopes, whose dream had ever been that later on, when he should be master of a vessel, he would restore their shattered fortunes by taking to wife some pretty young heiress of Provence. What was he to do, then, since that door was closed to him, since her father stood between them and he would have to face down all social prejudices and conventionalities, against which, however, all his being revolted, this evening, in the overmastering love that filled his heart?

He seated himself at his table to write a letter of farewell to Madeleine; he commenced two, which he immediately destroyed. To whom could he intrust a letter, moreover, so that she would be certain to receive it? Would she be allowed to receive a communication from him in the house of her parents? And to think that she was so near, perhaps at that very

moment returning to her home along the familiar ways, alone, distracted, straining her eyes to catch a glimpse of him whom she was never to see more.

The end of it was that, at a late hour of the evening, he determined it would be best to wait and write her a good long letter from Port Saïd, or some other point among the first stops they made, at which her father could not take offense; a letter bearing a foreign postmark would be more likely to be received, because the distant writer was less an object of dread, and it might well be that they would see no more of him.

That he did not write, or that he put off doing so until a more remote period, was attributable also, in no small degree, to that mental inertia, to that habit of waiting on fatality, which was so important an element in his temperament—in connection with his subsequent stubbornness in adhering to the decisions, wise or foolish, as might be, at which he afterward arrived. And yet

the remorse and distress he experienced were great—as was his love; he had never known a passion to possess him thus entirely.

The next morning beheld him once again in the railway station where he had first seen Madeleine. In company with his new comrades he took the train for Toulon, thence to start forth on one of those expeditions full of uncertainty and danger, the prospect of which made the shrill scream of the locomotive ring in his ears with a strangely boding sound. And as the wheels began to revolve he turned his eyes upon the window, with a sensation of infinite sadness and desolation, for a last look at the little walled town which he had entered a short four months ago with such light-hearted indifference.

XXXVIII

ACROSS the Indian Ocean the good ship *Circe* was plowing her way merrily among the waves, rocked gently by the tranquil summer sea, her white sails glinting in the glowing light, hanging like a speck between the upper and nether expanses of deep blue infinity, and leaving behind her her ever-lengthening trail of snowy foam that flashed and sparkled in the sunlight.

Port Saïd had been left behind some days before, and Aden also, and Jean's letter to Madeleine still remained unwritten. When, knowing himself as he did, he made the mental admission that there was a probability of this adventure ending as the other one had done, the adventure at Quebec with the golden-haired, laughing Canadian girl, he experi-

enced a feeling of serious dissatisfaction with himself, and more particularly when he remembered how confiding she had shown herself—so confiding and so poor. At the recollection of her graceful and touching confession of poverty, at the recollection even of certain details of her attire, the poor cheap dresses that she protected so tenderly against the rain, her little gloves darned and mended with such careful pains, he felt himself overcome by one of those infinitely tender sensations of pity that constitute one of the manifestations of a deep, pure love, and he made a vow to himself that he would write to her as soon as he reached his destination. But then it was such a troublesome letter to write, since he had not yet made up his mind to marry her !

There were moments also when he was oblivious of everything, thanks to the mirth and merriment of his comrades, and to the entrancing grandeur of the spectacle that surrounded them on every side.

The *Circe* was to delay her voyage long enough to set him ashore at the mouth of the Red River, together with the other seamen who were intended to fill up the complement of the *Estoc*. This latter was a corvette, an old-fashioned sailing vessel with a great spread of canvas; grown old in the service, and weary after many years of cruising, she was now going out on station in the China seas, which was to be the last act in her career.

As it chanced, several of the old crew of the *Résolue* had been drafted on board, and Jean thus found himself again sailing in company with Le Marec and Joal, his two former chums and messmates, as well as with several others whom he knew, and the ties of old acquaintance were drawn taut once more.

Le Marec, who had attained the dignity of *second-maître*, had been carried off his feet by a sudden gust of passion eight or ten days before they sailed and taken to himself a wife. He was become extremely

saving, and had in view one single object, which was to serve his time out and go with his wife and live somewhere in the neighborhood of Brieuc, in a house that should have a garden attached to it. He was already grave and severe of aspect; wind and water, moreover, had conspired to impart a deep hue of purple to his countenance, which at times appeared fierce. There were a few white hairs beginning to show about his temples, and his one-and-thirty years, together with his extraordinary breadth of beam, made him consider himself entitled to assume a paternal air toward his comrades.

Joal was in the *mousqueterie*, and was a good type of the helot of the service, his mind equally void of ambition or aspirations; his limited understanding had submitted cheerfully to receive the yoke of discipline. All of life for him was summed up in the strict observance of his daily duties: at such a time of the day he was to scour a certain portion of the deck with

sand, at such another time he was to polish certain brass- or iron-work with tripoli, and he was never to permit himself to question the propriety or impropriety of these actions. Outside this sphere he was an excellent fellow, and his friends were sure of his affection and devotion at all times, and of his tender sympathy in misfortune.

The other members of Jean's mess were sufficiently agreeable, simple-minded youths, who spent much of their time in laughing and joking, and were pretty good at castle-building also, when they had time for it, although they did not know the name of this latter silent pastime. And at the pleasant evening hour devoted to spinning yarns and singing songs on the forecastle, they would collect in little social, compact groups, then would lie down on the scrupulously clean deck and go to sleep in the white moonlight or under the blazing southern stars.

During the voyage Jean was disturbed in the profounder and more mysterious

recesses of his soul by a multitude of things that his comrades saw, but in a much more confused and unintelligent way and with infinitely less depth of feeling: the sands and mirages of the Red Sea, and its blood-red sun, setting each evening in terrible, Apocalyptic splendor; Sinai, which they beheld in the distance, glowing like a seven-fold heated furnace, against a sky of molten gold; the ancient pastures of the Arabs, there, close on the port bow—all so familiar to him! And before him lay the great, the disquieting attraction, the enigma of that land of the Orient that he had never seen.

XXXIX

THE good ship dropped her anchor at last in her haven at the ends of the earth. He had reached his journey's end.

He beheld before him, in reality, not in a dream, the little gunboat that had been in his thoughts so much of late. She was resting tranquilly on the bosom of the dull-hued, sluggish river, made fast to the bank among the tall reeds, in an atmosphere so stifling that the slightest movement brought the perspiration out in great drops upon the forehead. *Estoc*, he read in large, plain letters on her black stern, the name that had haunted him all through his voyage with a sensation as if it were ominous of evil.

This was her anchorage, and consequently this little nook of earth was to be Jean's residence for the next eighteen

months. The *Estoc's* new men had been brought to the spot at evening, at that brief, enchanting moment that succeeds the debilitating heat of the day and precedes the coming of the night. Extending along the bank of the river, the water of which somehow failed to convey to the eye the usual impression of grateful coolness, was a village among the trees, or, to speak more correctly, a road cut through the dense vegetation and bordered with little portals that conducted to dwellings buried in masses of verdure; a little way beyond this the road made a bend, and the prospect ended in the shadows of a gloomy forest. Imprisoned aboard their ship during their long voyage, with nothing to interest them save the view of sky and sea that they obtained from the deck, the men were unprepared for the strangeness of the exotic scene. All their senses were vividly impressed, and Jean almost forgot to breathe. Their lungs, too, seemed to expand and contract more laboriously, as in

an overheated vapor bath, permeated by musky odors.

The soil was of a bright red, the vegetation on every hand of an intense metallic green, and the vividness of these hues was such that the only object with which they could be compared was the crude, fantastic coloring of a Chinese picture book ; even in the twilight the colors stood out in high relief against the increasing darkness ; it seemed as if the red of the soil and the green of the trees must continue to be visible even in the obscurity of night by their excess of brilliancy. The little portals that led to the hidden habitations were all preposterously fantastic in design, with a vague attempt to imitate animal forms in their ornamentation ; they seemed to shrink and endeavor to conceal themselves, as if ill at ease, under that perennial and depressing vegetation that dwarfed mankind and was victorious over everything. The men and women to whom this scene was the setting of their daily life-

drama came and went, attending to their strange little occupations ; they had small furtive eyes, turned upward obliquely at the corners ; their yellow skin had borrowed a tinge of red from the red soil ; they walked with a catlike, noiseless tread, either bare of feet or shod with paper sandals. The aspect of the domestic animals, lazily ruminating by the fences, of the birds nestling in the tree tops, of the most tiny flower that grew by the roadside, told the new-comers what life was to be for them in that remote hostile land that fate had assigned them for their abode.

And this little world, living its life in death among the trees, a race apart from all mankind, did not appear so much surprised that it was thus as that it was possible there should be worlds unlike it. The saffron-hued natives, whose bodies exhaled a mingled odor of musk and sweat, passed the sailors without condescending to turn their heads, giving them, as they went by, a vaguely supercilious smile, which the blue

jackets returned ; the feeling on each side was that they were and would be always strangers to one another. To the younger of the females alone did the sailors pay any attention with some show of gravity, for in the human race the senses do not pause before the barriers that separate races.

Upon the whole it was an impression of mocking irony, but more still of something sinister and terrible, that the men derived from their reception in this quarter of the globe, that had been for centuries forming and modeling its frail, yellow denizens, with their catlike smile and tread, and that was conscious of its power still to go on annihilating, with its miasms and its torpidity, the race of white men in untold numbers.

XL

FOR nearly a year now Jean had been living in that strange land. His cheeks had taken on a yellow hue, like those of the small feline beings, his neighbors, and his muscular force had wasted greatly.

He had tried to work during his unemployed moments on board the *Estoc*, but the incessant humid, oppressive heat, which continued uninterruptedly by night as well as by day, produced a peculiarly debilitating fatigue, not only of the body but of the mind, and he would remain seated before his diagrams and figures for hours at a time, incapable of applying himself, with a sensation in his brain of utter void and emptiness. And the poor little note books, reminders of his college days, that were constantly becoming less and less serviceable to him, filled as they were with

matter the sense of which eluded his apprehension, had begun to assume an aspect of great antiquity, owing to the inroads of mold, to the attacks of the white ants and the legion of infinitesimally small creatures that are endowed with means of destruction a thousand times swifter and more powerful in that land of death.

But an act of highest import in his existence had been accomplished finally: it was written and dispatched, that letter to Madeleine, that for so long a time had been the torturing anxiety of his waking moments. Little by little the girl's pretty face had come to occupy, almost to the exclusion of all else, his thoughts, now dulled and stupefied by the noxious influences of the atmosphere. Owing to the effect produced on him by solitude and nostalgia, he had come to live in such constant, persistent dreams of France, and France *with her*, that he had thrown all his objections to the winds and made up

his mind to do the one thing it was possible for him to do: marry her.

That the step would have an injurious effect upon his future there could be no doubt; it would place difficulties in the way of that return to Antibes, which, notwithstanding his want of steadiness and persistency in carrying out his plan, still continued to be his great object in life. But, once she was down there in Provence, who would ever suspect, beholding her walking at his side, so pretty, so graceful, with such charming and distinguished manners, that she had ever been a working-girl, earning her living with her needle?

A consideration that had been afflicting him for some time was that this return, this ineffably blissful dream of revisiting Antibes in company with Madeleine and his mother, appeared to him as a distant probability, which, instead of coming nearer, was constantly receding; of a truth, the realization of his dream seemed to be becoming more and more problematical;

it appeared as if it were doomed to die a lingering death beneath all that unfriendly verdure, in that air overloaded with perfumes, under that incessant warm rain. And one day he suddenly felt himself assailed by a sharp pang of anguish—the same anguish that he had already before experienced, of exile and anæmia, only aggravated—at the thought that Madeleine was nineteen years old, and that believing, as she had doubtless believed for the last ten or twelve months, that he had deserted her, she might well have bestowed her affections on another. And then—presto! he had jumped at the decision that had been resting in his mind half-formed since he left France—with feverish anxiety to catch the mail on the steamer that was soon to pass, he had sat down and written to his mother and to Madeleine's father.

He begged his mother to put herself immediately in communication with the parents, and request in form for him the hand of the object of his love.

XLI

AND her boy's letter was so prettily affectionate, so irresistibly appealing, that she had made haste to comply with his request and write, notwithstanding the feeling of terror that she experienced at thought of that low-born girl arising so unexpectedly between her and him, and entailing the ruin of all their hopes and irreparable disgrace and loss of caste.

It is true that the letter which she wrote was couched in such terms as a *lady* uses, that is, it was such a letter as those to whom it was addressed should consider themselves honored by receiving, but the main point was that in it she formally requested Madeleine's hand for her son, who was expected home in six months' time. After it was dispatched, commencing with the following morning, she watched each

day with impatient eagerness for the arrival of the postman, wishing and hoping in her heart of hearts that this Madeleine might be married, or have left the country, or have died, or done anything that might effect a riddance of her.

XLII

THE following week an answer came, written on thin, coarse paper, such as poor people use, by the hand of a woman unaccustomed to hold the pen—the hand of the other mother, evidently; a curt, dry, scornful answer, comprising only a few lines.

Madeleine's parents "believed that they remembered something" of that young man who had behaved so disrespectfully toward their daughter. But it was as good as settled that she was to marry a paymaster's clerk in the navy; she herself "didn't see any great objection" to the match, and hence it had not been thought best to inform her of this new offer. And in addition to that, her means would not allow her to marry one no better off than a quartermaster.

And behold, Jean's mother, instead of

experiencing that sensation of gratification and delight that she had anticipated from a refusal, was not only wounded, but was grieved and saddened to the bottom of her soul; that her son, her dearly beloved son, should be refused in such terms, when he had made the offering of his life!

Brooding over the matter as she did night and day, she at last came to think that she could discern a sort of fatal connection in all the evil turns with which destiny so malignantly persisted in afflicting her Jean. Was he really of so little account, her boy, was he fallen so low, that a sewing girl, a daughter of common people, should dismiss him thus? What a fall, my God! what a fall, after the dreams of other days, the dreams that she and the poor old grandfather, now dead and gone, had dreamed over that little curly head!

Upon a second reading of his letter, moreover, she saw that that love of his was deeply rooted in his heart, that he would

have to suffer profoundly. Should she write and tell him of his rejection ; should she inflict that suffering on him, away out there in his distant land of exile ? To what purpose, since he was to return so soon ? No, she would not do it ; she would pretend that the letter containing his request had not reached her yet, and when she came to write him by the next mail would fill the envelope, the last that was to bear his address on board the *Estoc*, with whatever other matter she might think of, but not this.

And then, too, other anxieties, that she had never known before, presented themselves to swell the discomfort arising from that indignity : her Jean had had some attacks of the insidious fever of the country ; he had not been able to conceal the fact from her when he was sent to hospital at Hanoi. In the house that she lived in at Brest there were other seamen's families, and not very long before she had witnessed the home-coming, from those

colonies, of two little sailor lads, scarcely more than boys, whose letters had not intimated that they were seriously ill, but whose frightful looks seemed to indicate that they had not long to live. Never had she felt herself so deserted, so alone with her distress, that a sentiment of superstitious terror deterred her from confiding to other women who were mothers. Sombre forebodings, a chilling, icy gloom descended and enwrapped her, like the folds of a funeral pall. Prayer ! the thought of it occurred to her from time to time, indeed, but she could not pray. During her earlier years she had been devout; her faith had been ardent, impulsive; somewhat of the Italian nature, somewhat idolatrous, perhaps, but to-day that was all past and ended, not so much from incredulity as from her deep-seated revolt against such an accumulation of disaster and ruined hopes. Between the Virgin who sat aloft in heaven, so calmly indifferent, and herself, so wretched and disconsolate on earth, a

veil had been drawn, and all her adoration was transferred to her boy. Although she had continually before her eyes the two holy images that she had brought with her from her Provençal home and fastened to the wall of her bedchamber, she prayed no more. She never crossed the threshold of a church, but lived a life of silent suffering and revolt, her every faculty concentrated in the one single persistent, torturing, delicious occupation of waiting.

XLIII

AND Madeleine, in the little town where doubtless her life will continue to run on monotonously as ever, will Madeleine, once she shall be married to another, quickly forget her friend of other days ?

Or, who can tell, will she remember ? in the fleeting succession of those spring-times that in the end will rob her of her fresh beauty, as she returns to her lowly home in the soft May twilight, along those streets that wear the same unvarying aspect, through that avenue of lindens as ever solitary and deserted, will she remember, will she be haunted by the memory of that Jean whom she once loved, and by his image, reluctant to vanish from her heart ? At the pleasant, tranquil evening hour, in the lengthening shadows of the new vernal

growths, will she once again behold his shade, leaning against the trunks of those trees that are sempiternally the same, the youthful shade of him she loved? Who shall say?

XLIV

AFTER plowing her way for many a time through the hot, muddy water of the river and battling against its rapid currents, the *Estoc* was once again at her usual anchorage, among the reeds, just off the village in the wood.

And now the time was come when Jean was to leave that country. On a still, sultry evening, like that evening which eighteen months before had witnessed his arrival a strong and healthy man, he was picking his way with slow and feeble steps toward a carriage that stood waiting, supported by a brother sailor, turning his pallid face in the direction of the gunboat to bid farewell with nod and smile to those who were to remain.

Everything reminded him of the evening of his landing; the crepuscular moment

was the same, there was the same amazing brilliancy of red soil and lustrous foliage, the same odors, the same yellow natives, who, before vanishing within their huts beneath the trees, turned for the last time their little enigmatic, oblique eyes on him who was departing. In the odorous, humid atmosphere, beneath the great oppressive trees, life was ever the same, warm and languid, entirely different from ours. And all those objects that beheld Jean's departure seemed conscious that once more they had infused their poison into the system of someone from France.

Of late days, in addition to the stubborn fever, that returned with inexorable regularity at stated intervals, dysentery had set in and at once assumed its gravest aspect. This is a disease whose course can never be predicted with any certainty; sometimes it selects the strong for its victims and passes by the feeble, and again the converse is the case; sometimes it finishes its murderous work in a few weeks,

sometimes in many years. Some return to France who, to all appearances, have escaped scot free, but the insidious malady is all the time gnawing at their vitals, and at the end of ten years, or it may be twenty, makes an end of them; while others, with far less power of resistance, on whom the disease seems to have taken a much stronger hold, recover, no one can tell why.

Two of the young men who sailed from France with Jean had died before the first year was ended. He was leaving the country a very sick man, his features drawn and pinched, the skin of his face like parchment; the slightest effort, even the attempt to walk a few steps, would bring the perspiration in streams from his limbs and body.

And occasionally, at his moments of awakening, he had the impression—which did not remain long with him, it is true—that his return had been too long delayed.

XLV

AT Saigon they found a number of soldiers and sailors of the local station who had completed their time and were awaiting an opportunity of returning to their native land, and, in addition, the entire ship's company of the *Circe*, that had had her armament removed and was to be anchored permanently in the stream. Through motives of economy all these people were crowded on board the *Saône*, an old-time sailing vessel altered to a steamer, that was to return to France by the longer way around the Cape of Good Hope.

That he might be spared the passage of the Red Sea, with its terrible debilitating heat, Jean had asked and obtained permission to sail on board the *Saône*, where he would also have the benefit of the company

of Le Marec, Joal, Kerbhoulis, all his old friends and messmates of the *Résolue* and the *Circe*.

These men, too, had suffered to some extent from the same complaint as Jean, but far less than he, and there was now scarcely a trace of it left on them. This was accounted for by the fact that for the last eighteen months they had been serving at sea, while he, whose duties confined him to the streams and swamps of the interior, had been constantly compelled to inhale the poisonous exhalations of the rank vegetation.

XLVI

THE sea air was at first beneficial, and hope returned to him. As long as they continued to have the trade winds of the northern hemisphere with them he could remain on deck, seated in the shade, inhaling deep draughts of the rejuvenating breeze, watching the handling of the ship and chatting with his friends.

But not many days elapsed before they entered the equatorial regions, with their oppressive calms, enervating humidity and drenching rains. Then, notwithstanding all the tender care of which he was the object, there ensued a sudden prostration which obliged him to take to his cot and remain below in the ship's hospital.

In the beginning his feeling was that of the mingled stupefaction and incredulity

which is experienced by the very young and very strong, who always refuse to admit in their own case the possibility of the malady terminating fatally. While at his post on board the *Estoc* it had seemed to him that, once he was out of that Chinese sweat-box, a few whiffs of bracing sea air and the pleasant thought of being homeward bound would suffice to make him a well man. Could it really be that his return had been too long delayed !

Mon Dieu, how sluggishly they crept along, how persistently those everlasting calms held on ! Would the breeze never spring up, would they never light the furnace fires and start the engines !

And on waking one day in the afternoon, heavier of head and more anguished at heart than usual, from an unrefreshing slumber, the truth presented itself to him in all its appalling nakedness ; he saw how it was with him, and with the knowledge came a spasm of horror and dismay, as if before him he had beheld a fathomless

abyss of night and blackness into which he was on the point of falling—

His old comrades of the *Résolue* often came and sat by his bedside, especially Le Marec and Joal, who devoted to him every moment that they could snatch from their duties. He loved them both tenderly, he thanked them, and would sometimes display an interest in their attempts to cheer him ; and it seemed to him that they brought with them in their coarse garments a wholesome breath of the fresh air above. But how little did ties like these count for as the great end drew near ! Ah, no ; it was the mother in whom all love and affection centred, who was all in all to him ; his mother, upon whom he was ever calling from the depths of his soul, and for whom he yearned despairingly.

And still no sign of a breeze ! Still the dead calm and the stifling hot, damp atmosphere in which his strength was wasting, wasting, as in a Turkish bath too

long protracted. And at his side were other patients, gradually sinking, little soldiers, mere boys not over twenty, consumed with dysentery, with ashen faces and frames of skeletons. And to these sick men it seemed as if their torment was to be protracted to infinity, rocking thus idly on the broad bosom of the ocean, advancing no step toward home.

XLVII

ON the tenth day, however, in the early morning hours, this stagnant condition of affairs commenced to end.

A breeze sprang up, so faint at first as barely to be perceptible, but freshening constantly, and before it, in a sky less like a brazier, more like our own, a bevy of small fleecy, pearl-tinted clouds scudded merrily. It was warm, this breeze, but possessed such invigorating qualities that it seemed cool; through the long wind sails, whose mouths yawned to receive it, it swept downward even to the depths of the ship's hold, to the sick bay filled with feverish emanations, where the patients received it with a sensation of delicious comfort and well-being. It was the southern trade wind, and the sky was the unvarying sky of the tropics; the *Saône* had entered those regions

that know no change, and henceforth the same unfailing wind would urge her onward, night and day, toward the Cape.

Stretched on his cot away at the bottom of the ship, Jean was conscious of all that was happening above in the air and sunshine. The boatswain's silver whistle, that had been silent all through those long, oppressive days, now piped its cheeriest strains, and the sick man's ear, more alert in inactivity, caught the ringing sounds, now short and sharp, again drawn out in lingering accents, or modulated in birdlike trills and quavers ; he seized the meaning of each different signal as easily as he would have read a book writ in a familiar language ; he divined all that was going on aloft upon the great masts and yards, and could have told the name of each separate bit of canvas as it was set to catch the favoring gale. Their speed increased with every hour, and everything and everybody seemed pervaded by a sense of lightness ; even the water of the sea seemed lighter, that water that is

oftentimes so dense and heavy when the wind is adverse and there is a head sea on; to-day, ship, wind and sea were all running in the same direction, and now, instead of the great ugly waves that had often dashed like a battering ram against the frail walls of the sick bay, all that Jean heard was the ripple of the glancing water, the splash of the flying spray. Besides the positive physical comfort that this beneficent wind brought to those poor exhausted invalids, it also inspired them with hope, and as the *Saône* threw out sail upon sail to the breeze Jean's eyes, dreamily fixed on visions of distant France, recovered almost completely the expression of life that they had lost. Oh, how good it was to be speeding onward thus! Oh, let them hasten, quick, quick! let them fly like a bird across that watery waste, whose terrible immensity was keeping him from his mother. If but the numbered tale of his days could be prolonged a little; if he could but live six or seven weeks more in that friendlier air

that was already restoring to him his strength!—*mon Dieu*, one can never tell, with these strange complaints, that often last longer than one thinks. Only six or seven weeks more, and they would be at their voyage's end! And it came to appear to him more and more a possibility, almost a certainty, indeed, that he was again to behold their poor abode at Brest, that he loved now with all his heart, and to clasp his mother in his arms, and have her at his bedside to hold his hands in hers at the last, dread hour.

As evening was descending, at that pleasant moment succeeding the setting of the sun, an irresistible impulse seized him; he felt better, ever so much better, and so from his sick-bed he arose to go and mingle with the living who were up there on deck, breathing the pure, cool air; having bathed his face in cold water and put on a clean suit of duck, he started on his upward journey, dragging himself laboriously up

the long ladders, like a phantom in the semi-darkness. His great strength, that had been his sole terrestrial possession, had deserted him; still, in the stout topman's arms, where the muscles had stood out in great knots and bunches once, there was a remnant of pith that disease had not destroyed entirely, and he used it to hoist himself up, hanging on grimly to each round of the ladder, while his legs, first to give out, weakened under the weight of his body.

At last his head emerged into the open air. As if arising from the tomb he gazed around him, feasting his charmed eyes with the view of surrounding space, the bellying sails, the deep sky in which the stars were beginning to appear.

The *Saône* was flying like some great white-winged bird of night before the austral trade wind. The good ship, speeding onward and restoring vanished hopes! And as Jean raised his head above the companionway, the first breath of welcome

air that reached him also brought to his ears a joyful and familiar sound: a song that, barely audible below, up there seemed suddenly to swell and burst in triumphant salutation of his re-appearance among his brother sailors. It was, as ever, the inevitable "Old Neptune," the same old light, catchy chorus that had been sung over and over again at the same evening hour. And the *Saône* went pressing onward into the infinite solitude of silence, that was scarcely disturbed by the gentle ripple of the water beneath her bow, scattering upon the stillness of the night the joyous sounds, leaving behind her a trailing wake of melody, that was lost and wasted for that there was no ear to hear it.

When Jean's eyes, long unaccustomed to the spectacle, had renewed acquaintance with the immensity of sea and sky, they turned to the towering edifice of canvas that, spread to catch every breath of wind, was urging the vessel onward upon her course: a tall, fantastic structure, snow-

white against the diaphanous blue of night, that seemed to fill the whole expanse of air and pierce the heavens with its unstable fabric, unreal and unsubstantial as a vision. White, too, were the singers in their linen garments ; some stretched on the white planks in every attitude of repose and well-being, others grouped in form of pyramid on the ship's boats that occupied the central portion of the deck, and others still, higher and more distant, clustered on the bridge. "Old Neptune, Monarch of the Seas," sang the choristers, motionlessly reclining in the starry splendor of the night. The sprightly refrain of the song returned incessantly, taken up nonchalantly, as in a semi-slumberous state, by fresh young vibrating voices, so modulated as not to dissipate a pleasant dream. And all this edifice of white sails and men in white pressed onward, careening and bowing gently to the breeze, like some fantastic thing soon to be swallowed up in darkness ; pressed onward ever, quicker and

more quickly still, racing, flying through the transparent night, with soothing, softly swaying motion, and occasionally a little bump, like a universally pervasive thrill of joy.

The poor fugitive from below decks, upon whom Death had already laid his finger, wondered at this display of fairy-land, so long unseen by him as almost to be forgotten. All that made a sailor's life so entrancing to him, all that he loved so in his profession, was on this last, supreme occasion displayed with the utmost of spectacular effect before his eyes, that soon would see no more. Charmed and dazzled, with an ardent longing that he might live as long as they, the young comrades who surrounded him, he came forward, very weak, his strength all gone, with a dizziness that became more pronounced at each succeeding moment, seeking among all those white forms the friendly group where Marec and Joal were, that he might once again, as of old, take his place among them.

They were there, close at hand, and because they had recognized him they hushed their song; they looked upon his face, where a brief time had wrought such a startling change, where the pallor and emaciation were even more strongly marked in the dim vague light of evening.

“Oh, it is you, my boy!” said Marec—one of those elderly personages who play the part of heavy father on shipboard, who assume patronizing airs by reason of their massive squareness of build and sun-burnt faces, and whose age may range anywhere between thirty and thirty-five.

“Make room there, you fellows; make room for Berny.”

Around him silence reigned while his friends were arranging a little nook where he might be comfortable, but a few steps away the chorus went on uninterruptedly, with unabated spirit and the same careless, *insouciant* swing. A piece of sailcloth was brought and folded twice across as a pro-

tection for his wasted limbs against the hard planks, and he yielded himself passively to the arms that were extended to assist him, for his strength had entirely deserted him, and he was conscious of a sort of trembling sensation coming over him, an evil and sinister presage.

“Lean on me,” “Here’s a cushion for you,” said those nearest him, offering their breast or shoulder as a support for the death-stricken man. And when they had assured his comfort they struck into “Old Neptune” again, coming in on the refrain, and Jean found himself in the midst of the tuneful band, experiencing a momentary sensation of comfort—or rather of diminished suffering—by reason of his recumbent position. With head thrown back and half-closed eyes, his delighted gaze took in the entire fairy-like display, from the trucks of the tall masts down to the snowy deck. Rocked lazily by the slow, uniform motion of the gentle swells, those groups of humanity,

motionless and white as statues of marble, were painted on the dim blue curtain of the night with the vague indistinctness of figures in a dream, and against the sky, decked with the blazing jewels of the southern constellations, were outlined the lofty masts and phantom-like white sails, that, as they swayed under the impulse of the ever-freshening breeze, described with their summits wider arcs among the stars, but swayed so gently and with a movement so regular and uniform that one might have thought it was the heavenly bodies that had suddenly lost their immobility and were performing a stately minuet on high. And all the time the singers were casting to the bland wind their clear sparkling notes, that seemed to fly away on wings. In the midst of this transparency, for which there was no name, the transparency of night without its obscurity, that vessel, careening under her cloud of canvas, her deck filled with all those motionless white mariners, ceased to have

the aspect of reality. The music, that continuous monotone of fresh young voices, soothing as a lullaby, and the uninterrupted gentle oscillatory motion communicated to all, and their flight, rapid and easy as a bird's, all served to add to and intensify the impression of immateriality that was conveyed by things visible and tangible. The whole display might have been taken for some unsubstantial, melodious pageant that the trade wind was urging onward to some non-existent haven, in those limitless, shoreless regions, the realm of the infinitely void.

But not for long did Jean continue to behold the magic spectacle that filled his already enfeebled brain with wonder. The delicious coolness of the night, that to the others brought health and strength, in him only served to hasten the process of mortal disorganization. A vague feeling of discomfort began to manifest itself in his chest, limbs and bowels, and developed rapidly into acute pain. Then his legs and arms

became heavy as lead and lost their power of movement, as in one who had remained too long in a constrained position, and the sensation spread, and kept spreading, first to the loins, then to the chest and larynx. It was like a slow, progressive death, ascending gradually toward the head, that was lucid still and retained its faculty of thought. It reached his lips, and they contracted spasmodically, and when he would have called for assistance on his friends, who had not ceased their song, his tight-locked mouth would not respond: the only sound he could give utterance to was an inarticulate moan, distressful to hear.

The sailors were alarmed by that sinister cry, which seemed to be wrested from the very depths of his being. Marec, bending tenderly over him, saw the writhing contraction of the lips and the look of supplication in his eyes. Then with infinite precaution and the affectionate words of loving brothers, three of them took him in their strong arms, bore him down the lad-

der, and laid him on his bed. And now, unconscious of all that was going on around him, helpless as a little child, he lay in the warm infirmary, that on shipboard was called the "death trap."

XLVIII

HE did not die that night, however. Down below, in the “death trap,” the doctor brought him back to life.

For several days he lived with scarcely any other companions than his thoughts, moments of hope alternating with others of chill despair at the prospect of his solitary death. He observed the doctor’s directions with scrupulous care, in the one sole thought that had come to dominate him more and more, to last long enough to see his mother once again. Each day there was to be seen lying on his bed a poor pitiful letter that he had begun to write her ; a letter of farewell that he had commenced when the fever was on him, and into which he infused all his soul ; then exhaustion would supervene and compel him to lay down the pen, and afterward, in a moment

of returning hope or of determination not to die, he would tear the sheet in fragments. His chest—a box of white pine, such as all sailors own—stood at his bed's head, containing many precious little objects, the thought of abandoning which grieved him inexpressibly: portraits and letters of that mother whom he so yearned to see once more, many of them very old and yellow with age, most of them having some connection with circumstances more or less memorable of their past; and there were also two of the note-books of his old college days, in which, on an evening when the sunshine and his dreams alike were bright, he had inscribed the date when he became an eligible candidate for the *Borda*.

He suffered little, but was terribly weak, with a growing weakness for which there was no remedy. His fitful slumbers were disturbed by dreams, and he would awake to find himself lying drenched in a cold night sweat. Evidences of approaching dis-

solution had begun to manifest themselves in his brain: pitiable hallucinations, delusive ideas, and affections of boyhood that returned to mock him. His thoughts reverted constantly to matters connected with the beginning of his life, and he recalled them with a morbid fidelity and intensity that was almost like second sight. On the other hand, images of women and of love had ceased to trouble him; for some inscrutable reason, doubtless a physical one difficult of explanation, these images had been the first to die, in his memory that was also about to perish. Forgotten now was that young maid of Rhodes, who, every evening during one bright month of June, had come down the hills to meet him at the old deserted harbor, attracted by the velvety softness of his young eyes; forgotten, the fair Canadian, who for a time had made very dear to him a certain lonely street in the outskirts of Quebec; forgotten, all forgotten. Of Madeleine alone did he think occasionally, because for her his love had

been of a more complex nature, more closely associated with the mystery of that inner human entity which we call the soul ; he had glimpses still of her pale face and ardent, deep-set young eyes, or seemed to hear the sound of her timid voice in murmured conversation at the twilight hour, under the flowering lindens, beneath the new-born leaves on which came patterning down the warm rain of an April evening. But he did not linger on the picture long, turning from it to his mother, to his loved sunny land of Provence, to his own childhood's days—and especially to the days of his first assuming man's attire, of the little brown hat with the velvet ribbon. And unspeakable grief and despair would wring his heart at the sudden thought that never, never again would his eyes behold certain localities in that country, certain things pertaining to that time—at the thought, for instance, that he should nevermore tread a certain path, at a bend in which he and his mother had sat down to rest beneath

the pines, on a Sunday evening, in the springtime, long ago.

“He will last until the cold weather comes,” the doctor said. And he was right; the trade wind, that blew through the open hatches and down the wind sail, the warm, soft trade, that varied not by day or night, held him in a stationary condition.

XLIX

BUT one evening an immense, dirty-looking gray cloud rose above the southern horizon, and, creeping up the heavens, soon formed an impenetrable vault of blackness over all. And the wind that had so long favored them died away, and in the air, that suddenly became chill and piercing, two great albatrosses, the first they had seen, appeared—denizens of the sombre austral land. In the fading light and in the penetrating mist that descended and enwrapped the men as in an icy mantle, it was too dangerous a business to attempt at nightfall to penetrate further into those ill-known seas, overspread by that dense veil of clouds, and where everything was to be feared from the fickle and uncertain weather.

The next morning the entire aspect of things was changed on board the *Saône*, on which the sun had ceased to shine. Straw hats were replaced by old fatigue caps, that were pulled well down to protect the ears; the spruce uniforms of clean white duck were discarded for old blue woolen suits, worn and faded, which showed that the industrious moth and voracious cockroach had been at work on them. On deck there were signs of great activity among the watch whose turn of duty it was. Brand new sails were coming up from below, folded in long cylindrical bundles and supported on the shoulders of wavering, staggering rows of men. Cables of a tawny color, new, like the sails, and redolent of tar, were taken from the hold. As they were released from the coils a gang of sailors would seize the free end, and, starting on a run, "snake" them the ship's length, like endless serpents. Everything was done to the sound of the boatswain's whistle, and the shrill calls, trills and

quavers resounded uninterruptedly on the sharper air, which was beneficial to sound lungs, but mortal to weaker ones. Preparations were being made for the coming conflict with wind and waves in that inhospitable, treacherous zone.

The two albatrosses came very near, wheeling in wide circles around the ship; they were the same that had appeared the night before, and likely as not would continue for weeks to follow in the vessel's wake; and they maintained an incessant scream in their vile, raucous voice, which resembles nothing so much as the creaking of a rusty weathercock or unoiled pulley. And the quartermaster at the wheel, not appreciating their lugubrious music, shook his fist at the birds and addressed them thus :

“ I say there, you two great dirty sparrows over yonder, don't you think you might as well grease your pulley a bit.”

The truth was that the two albatrosses

seemed to him to be singing someone's death song.

The gale was prompt with its onset, commencing hostilities before the preparations for defense were completed. By the evening of the second day the fearful bellowing of the storm filled the air with its all-powerful voice and the din was deafening. The waves reared their mighty crests and came forward to the attack in long, serried line of battle. And the sailors were aloft in the rigging or out on the plunging yards, performing their duties, so fraught with danger. The poor rough, horny hands and the stubby nails worn down to the quick rasped and scraped on the refractory, water-soaked canvas as they gathered in the slack of the topsails, that were all reduced to a single reef. And faces took on a deeper shade of purple under the influence of the stinging cold, to which they had so long been unaccustomed.

In the "death trap," that was kept her-

metically closed, the motion was painfully apparent to the patients as the ship alternately climbed laboriously to the summit of some huge wave and then slid off with frightful velocity into the depths of the succeeding valley; the two men who had been so ill were released from their suffering on the following night.

Jean appeared to be in the last extremity of fever, but he continued to live on, with alternations of wild delirium and deepest prostration, in which his reduced pulse and scarcely perceptible breathing counterfeited death.

Oh, that letter, the letter for his mother, which he had not written! That was now his all-engrossing preoccupation, not very clearly defined at times, but always present to his mind, even in slumber—and so piteous, so pathetic! In his moments between sleeping and waking he constantly imagined that he was writing to her; it seemed to him he could see a sheet of paper on the bed, the pen held in his

fingers, and the characters traced by his hand, telling her of his distress and bidding her farewell. And then, awaking with a start, he would see that it was all a delusion of his senses, that his hand was hanging, heavy and inert, at his bedside, that there was no sheet traced with written characters before him on his counterpane. Then in his despair he would toss himself violently about upon his cot, beseeching the attendants to give him writing materials. They answered him as little children are answered :

“ Yes, yes ; pretty soon, in a few moments. As soon as the fever goes down a little you shall have your inkstand and your box.”

And the nurses exchanged a sorrowful look of compassion. What they did not tell him was that, in one of the ship’s more violent lurches, his precious box had rolled to the deck and been dashed in pieces, at the same instant that a great wave came on board, carrying all before it and flooding

every compartment of the vessel; and that the beloved objects, saturated with water of the ocean and fetid bilgewater, were nothing but a pitiful mass of pulp: letters, portraits, and the poor note-books of the schoolboy, between whose pages rested, buried forever in oblivion now, his cherished hopes of admission to the *Borda*.

Poor child, whom nature had destined for a life of *insouciance* and perennial youth, for love and dreamy reverie, for joyous health and the bright smile of gladness, he preserved to the end that boyishness which had been his charm, and also his curse. And yet at certain moments he was one of those seers whose gift of second sight enables them to look into futurity and read the frightful secrets of the infinite. But it was as a child, with childish revolts and incredulity and wonder, that he was to face the conqueror, Death; longing above all else to have his mother by to soothe him with her presence. His soul went out to her in ineffable impulses of tenderness,

he had a sensation of heartfelt remorse for having at times been somewhat forgetful of her, for having sometimes caused her to suffer in those days when life was exuberant within him. Ah, the sweet letters of tears and penitence that he had in mind to write her! In the *beyond*, the *hereafter*, he placed no belief, for in this respect, as in so many others, he was a sailor. Seamen are not atheists; they pray, they make offerings to the Virgin and the saints, but with puerile inconsistency they seldom believe in the existence of their own soul beyond this life. And he, too, prayed, in a confused way, and his crude but ardent prayers only asked that his body might not be surrendered to the deep, that he might be permitted to live yet for a brief while, that it might be granted him to die in a certain poor bedchamber, in a certain bed covered with a knitted counterpane, at the side of which should be a face gentler than all faces upon earth, enframed in bands of soft gray hair. Oh,

that it were God's will that in the cemetery of Brest, where soon they would be now, he might have a grave at which his mother would come and kneel! And it might even be that, when the crew were paid off, the money coming to him would be sufficient to transfer his body to dear Provence and give it sepulture in the soil of his native land. But no, it was not to be; he felt that life was leaving him too fast and the sea was to be his grave, and his eyes dilated with horror at the thought that before many days his earthly remains would be hurled, wrapped in a shroud of sailcloth, down, down through the measureless depths of the dark waste that lay below.

At last the final agony set in; it was bitter and protracted, but the mental part of him had no share in it; it was wholly material. And on the fourth day of the storm, amid the fury of the raging, unchained elements, when the gale was at its height and its uproar filled the heavens,

death came to him, almost unnoticed by his brother sailors, to whom self-preservation was the ruling instinct for the time being, in those hours of toil and danger.

L

HE was committed to the deep, and his immersal passed as a thing of minor consequence.

At break of day on a dark, forbidding morning his remains, sewed in an envelope of coarse duck, were laboriously dragged up the long ladders to the deck by two men, who held their grisly burden by the neck. "What has he with him in the sack?" one of them asked; "books?" It was the note-books of the *Borda*, his mother's letters, the lid and broken fragments of the box, everything that had been his. The man who sewed him in his shroud—a humble soul, who had never learned to read—had piously placed with him, in his coarse winding sheet, all that remained of the things which were so dear to him. With great difficulty, on account

of the laboring of the vessel, they succeeded in getting him up the ladder, where, with a brutality that could not be avoided, his unsentient head from time to time bumped against the projecting angles of the woodwork. By a hatchway, that was opened furtively a little space to give him passage, he was delivered to other waiting hands, that raised him to the deck.

In the heavy weather then prevailing the chaplain, an aged and ailing man, was unable to leave his stateroom to conduct the burial service, and the wave-washed deck was deserted, save for the watch and the men detailed to conduct their comrade's funeral.

The ship made a more violent plunge than usual, and just at that moment they launched the body into one of those yawning watery chasms that open and close again immediately. A great wave, topped with a fringe of foam, came up and dashed it against the ship's quarter with a force sufficient to grind all the bones to powder;

then it vanished from mortal vision, plunging swiftly downward into the realm of silence and unending night, commencing its infinite descent into the unfathomed depths below—

LI

ALMOST immediately, as if by magic, the weather changed. The rage and fury of the elements began to subside, as they had arisen, without apparent cause. The waves, with an air of weariness and lassitude after the conflict, went tumbling over one another as they scurried away in disorder, their violence neutralized by the effect of a storm of more ancient date that had been raging in some distant region.

The two albatrosses, that had remained invisible as long as the gale lasted, now showed themselves again, accompanied by a retinue of cape-pigeons and gray petrels, that in squawking, unmelodious accents proclaimed their insatiable hunger.

And the wind went down ; it began to be possible to converse without raising the voice to a scream ; the routine of the ship

resumed something of its usual course in the comparative tranquillity, and the covers of the hatches were removed.

In the afternoon, the wind still continuing to fall, order was again established in almost every quarter of the ship. The *Suône* once more spread her snow-white wings, which had been folded with such difficulty and danger, and the sailors found time to think of him who had departed amid the crash and uproar of the elements. Jean's friends began to reflect with feelings of sorrow and sadness on their loss. And at length came the peaceful evening hour, the hour when the crew is mustered for prayer.

At the usual order, given by the officer of the watch in a curt, abstracted tone, the bugle sounded. Responsive to the sound two hundred seamen came streaming up from below, like a rising tide, through the narrow companionways, and formed in line upon the deck. A hundred to starboard, a hundred to port, forming two

wavering, shuffling masses of humanity that undulated like a flock of sheep; mechanically they fell into line along those low, flimsy bulwarks which alone separated them from the ravening sea. They were crowded so that their shoulders interlocked, crowded like cattle on that frail refuge of planks that they called the *Saône*, and their crowding had in it something unutterably pitiful, that spoke of man's littleness in the midst of that infinite expanse of sea and sky, in that debauch of space that was around them on every side, and where, in the roar of the waves, in the cry of the sea-birds, in everything, spoke the voice of mighty Death, the conquerer.

The chaplain had also come on deck in his black gown that fluttered in the wind. And the officer in command, in the same sharp, peremptory tone that he had employed in giving the other necessary commands, now ordered: "Prayers!" but yet with more of feeling in his voice, be-

cause, perhaps, there arose in him a memory of the poor fellows whose names would no longer be carried on the ship's muster-roll, and of him who had that very morning been offered as a sacrifice to greedy ocean.

“Prayers!” The ship’s bugler, once more distending his cheeks and the veins of his neck, as he had done so many times before, gave to the surrounding outer void that short, staccato call that each evening summons poor Jack to come and say his *Pater* and *Ave Maria*. Loud and clear the brazen notes rang out, on this occasion with a strange, unusual tone, over the wild waste of angry water. And the call seemed somehow like an appeal to a power that was very far away, or non-existent, before which their supplications were to be laid for form’s sake, hopelessly.

“Prayers!” At the command two hundred calloused hands were swiftly raised to two hundred woolen caps, which fell with a simultaneous motion to their owners’ side, and every man was silent and motion-

less. And the two hundred young heads appeared to view, divested of their covering, close-clipped, blond for the most part, shining with bright reflections in the fading light of evening; the brawny shoulders, their contours visible under the well-worn jackets, were closely pressed together in a homogeneous mass and swayed with a gentle motion in unison with the rolling of the ship.

“Our Father, which art in Heaven,” the priest began in a voice that trembled slightly and had not its usual impassive steadiness. And thereat two or three of the younger and more childlike among the crew raised their eyes confidingly to that heaven of which the good man spoke. Night was beginning to draw her veil of darkness over it, and around them, while the recitation of the *Pater* still went on, the petrels and albatrosses, scavengers of the deep, lingered in the twilight, wheeling in wide circles with the same hoarse cries, chanting, in concert with wind and ocean,

the chant of the great transformer of our being, the chant of mighty Death.

Most of the seamen had mechanically turned their eyes on the black-gowned man while he was praying, and now that their faces were no longer animated by the careless smile, it was easy to read in them their long inheritance of toil and poverty. All those young countenances, so hardy and vigorous, wore an aspect of hardness and materialism that was intensified by the fatigue of their laborious day, with an indescribable expression of humble resignation and passive endurance ; among the Bretons, whose numbers predominated, traces of their primitive semi-barbarism were manifest. It was in the eyes alone, which, as they were bent on the priest, it could be seen still preserved the trustful candor of boyhood, that here and there was indicated some tendency of their owner toward things spiritual, toward some legendary paradise, some indeterminate, vague notion of eternity ; but there were others that

emitted no light from within, that merely reflected the aspects of external nature, whose owners paused at the most rudimentary conceptions, scarce higher than the confused dreams of animals.

“I salute thee, Mary full of grace; thou art blessed above all women, and Jesus, the fruit of thy womb is blessed——” His accent was slower and his intonation more broken as he recited the ancient prayer; at the same time those great children who were listening to his words began to manifest a sort of shame-faced sorrow as Jean’s memory rose to their minds; those who had known and loved him evinced a grief that was deep and sincere, while in the little group where were Joal and Marec, who had buried him, every eye was moist. Over the heads of all the men who stood there in line hovered, for the last time, the spirit of him who had that morning been committed to the dark green depths of ocean.

“Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for

us——” The most inattentive lent an ear to these words, that they had heard a hundred times before, which now appeared fraught with new significance. And when the chaplain, after a preliminary pause and speaking in a tone of yet deeper solemnity, uttered these last words, so sublime in their simplicity: “—for us, poor sinners—now—and in our hour of death,” quick-coming tears sprang to the eyes of two or three among the listening men and rolled down their cheeks, like a refreshing shower of rain.

“Amen!” The young blond heads all bent as when a field of grain is rippled by a passing breeze, a few hands were swiftly raised to breasts and foreheads, and all was over; the wind freshened with the approach of night, and men began to sling their hammocks amid an uproar of jests and laughter, and thoughtless gayety reigned again on board. Prayer and thoughts of death seemed to be left behind in the immense, ever-changing void that

was constantly receding in the distance. On that vessel where his comrades had beheld him die Jean's image was already grown pale and indistinct, suddenly thrust away into the darkest corner of men's memory. In their exuberance of animal life those young beings were quick to forget.

Out of respect to him there was no singing that night, but the next day the song "Old Neptune," started at first by a few voices, was soon taken up and sung in chorus. And as if all on board were as it had been, the *Saône* pursued her long and weary way toward France.

LII

IT was a month later, on one of those April days, made up of showers and sunshine and in which the cold of winter lingers still, that are so common in Brittany, when the good ship came to anchor in the harbor of Brest, where the anxious mother was watching for her arrival.

There had been no further sickness on board. After Jean, indeed, three other unfortunates had been consigned to a grave in the infinite waste of water, but that was away down in the southern hemisphere, in those distant regions where the albatross wings its solitary flight. The remainder of the patients had recovered, and the more bracing atmosphere had quickly restored them to a condition of vigorous health.

All the sailors, even those of them who had neither mother, wife nor sweetheart, and for whose coming there was no one on the lookout, were wild with joyous excitement to be at home once more. When the anchor was over the bow and everything made snug aloft and aloft, there was not much of an attempt made to enforce discipline, and things on board were at sixes and sevens. The officers, too, were only human beings, and, like the men, their thoughts were elsewhere; knowing that what had been a long and dangerous service was now virtually ended, they winked at the prevailing want of order. They had no more than entered the port than disaggregation commenced; it was the beginning of the end; the ship was going out of commission, involving the dispersal of all those men and inanimate objects that for more than two years had been facing danger in distant seas, bound together by ties so close, having one common name, governed by one spirit of *amour propre*,

forming one body ruled, it may almost be said, by a single soul.

The view was a pleasant one upon the whole that greeted their eyes on that spring day, in that French roadstead, after their long absence, although there was menace of wind and rain in the dark clouds that hung low in the humid atmosphere, propelled by fitful gusts of air.

The health officer had been sent for, whose authorization they must have before they could communicate with the outer world, with their new-recovered France. And a few boats came up and hung around the *Saône*, such unwieldy and clumsily constructed affairs as pervade the waters of Brest, heavily sparred to meet the perpetual bad weather that prevails in those stormy regions, with sails of coarse brown canvas, and all of them displaying scars that they had received in battle with their enemy, the northwester. The spectacle certainly lacked the cheerful gayety of the Mediterranean ports, Jean's native country,

where hundreds of small, frail barks, bedizened with flags and painted in bright colors, filled with laughing, chattering men and women, come dancing over the tranquil water to carry by storm the home-arriving vessel.

In these boats, which were made to preserve a respectful distance pending the arrival of the health officer, were women with all sorts of wares and merchandise for sale, laundresses, boarding-house keepers, little sewing-girls, all bent on relieving poor Jack of a portion of his hard-earned wages; and occasionally, also, a mother, a sister, or a young person who simply styled herself an "acquaintance," would call on some particular sailor by name and, when he presented himself at one of the gun-ports, would greet him cordially while waiting for permission to go on board and give him a warmer salutation.

Those of the crew who were so unfortunate as to have no acquaintances among

the female portion of Brest's population did not allow that fact to deter them from using their eyes, but resting their elbows on the hammock nettings, with faces expressive of contentment at once more beholding civilized women's faces, exchanged profound reflections on the fashion of the ladies' attire, especially commending a certain little corsage that had been introduced during their absence.

By way of killing time the little group of friends that was so soon to be dissolved forever, embracing among its numbers Joal, Marec and Kerboulhis, was collected on the forecastle, looking, laughing, and talking of whatever came in their heads.

But all at once Pierre Joal, with a face as blanched as if he had seen a ghost, darted back, pulling the others after him by the arm: "Jean's mother !!!" And the five men, like frightened children, first stooped to hide behind the nettings, then, bent almost double, retreated to the centre of the deck where they could not be seen.

Jean's mother ! yes, it was she, who had come forth from her home and was there, close at the ship's side, with eager, questioning eyes dilated wide, half from joy, half from alarmed impatience. Among all those smiling young faces that lined the nettings of the *Saône* she had sought her boy, and had not found him, had not found him yet.

For months she had been looking forward to her son's return, dreaming of it by night, planning and preparing for it by day ; she had done her best to beautify their humble little home, to which they both, however, because they had lived there together some little space of time, were beginning to feel attached, inasmuch as it was beyond them to secure a better one. To *his* chamber in particular she had devoted all her loving care. By dint of economy, patient toil, and her inherent ingenuity and good taste, she had effected her embellishments without trenching on

her little capital, which she had placed out at interest. And that morning, when the old watchman, whom she had engaged for the service several days before, came and notified her that the *Saône* was signaled and would anchor in the roadstead in two hours' time, she made haste to put everything in order about the apartment, went out and purchased flowers for the vases, and hired a woman to come in and cook and serve the evening meal. Her attire, too, had been a subject of deep thought and anxiety to her; as he had it so at heart that she should always be a lady in externals, in ordering her new hat she had given directions that it should have a feather in it—a vanity that she had not indulged herself with for the last five years—a gray feather, of a shade she felt sure would please him. But when she came to dress preparatory to going down to the harbor, she hesitated long, owing to the unsettled condition of the weather, whether or not she should wear that fine new hat that she

had bought to do honor to their Sunday evening walks. She made up her mind to put it on, however, for the greater glory of that son who liked to see her present a brave appearance before the other sailors and the officers of the ship.

When, as they left the town behind them, the boatman to whom she had entrusted herself pointed to a ship in the distance that had barely got her anchor down, and said : "There she is, your *Saône*!" a sudden fit of trembling came over her, with a slight sensation of dizziness.

How would he look, what appearance would her Jean present after his long absence? She felt that her mind would not be at rest until her eyes had reassured her on that score. She thought of the dysentery and the fevers so prevalent in Cochin China, some slight attacks of which he had confessed to having experienced. And suddenly the matter appeared to her in a graver light than it had done before; she recalled to mind those young men whose

return she had witnessed, so ghastly pale, their constitution gone, who slowly wasted away in spite of their mothers' care. And as the *Saône* drew nearer and her tall bulwarks towered high and ever higher above the short, tumbling sea of the open roadstead, she thought how soon she was now to know the best or worst, and felt her heart assailed by alternating emotions of joy and dread, each more poignant than the other; but it was joy that predominated, with an eager, trembling impatience to clasp him in her arms and give him a mother's kiss.

Again she scanned the long row of faces that rose above the bulwarks and stretched without break or interruption from forecastle to quarterdeck. Her boy, why was he not there upon the deck, with all the others? Her heart sank and a sensation of icy dread came over her incontinent merely because she had not seen him yet—and still there was nothing strange in that, as she strove to make herself understand,

since he might be on duty in the between-decks. Her fears mastered her judgment; she lost her head for a moment and directed her boatman to run his craft in closer, heedless of the warning gestures of the sentry at the gangway, a rough untutored lad of Brittany, who held his musket tight clutched in one hand and with the other signaled them, "Keep off, keep off! You can't come on board; it is not permitted yet!"

On board the ship Jean's five friends, who had gathered about the foot of the main-mast, held a consultation in whispered, frightened tones. What was to be done? Notify the officer of the deck, opined Marec. M. Tanguy was on duty, a good fellow and a gentleman, who would come and break the news to her gently.

"Ah, poor lady!" Pierre Joal replied, "he may break it gently or abruptly, it's all one, with what there is to tell her."

Merciful Heavens! and there was the health boat coming alongside, almost on

board of them. It would not be possible to keep the poor mother off longer, she must be allowed to come on board with the others; nay, she must be nearest of them all, holding on by the rungs of the side-ladder, doubtless, in spite of orders to the contrary, for even now they could hear her voice demanding of the sentry in altered, palpitating tones, *where was Jean Berny?* And the young man, unversed in the world's ways, but who had nevertheless known from the beginning that it was his comrade's mother, remained like a fixture at the gangway, where his appointed station was, his face of a bright scarlet up to the very roots of his hair, feigning not to understand the question that came to him from below, turning his head and casting beseeching looks on those who had been the dead man's friends, as if appealing to them to come to his assistance, and quickly.

"Jean Berny—you know whom I mean—Jean Berny, the quartermaster?" the poor, supplicating voice went on, now

almost inaudible in its anguish and distress.

Then Pierre, in his alarm at the imminent prospect of her boarding the ship, suddenly resolved upon a course that would bring matters to a crisis. Taking from his pocket the little book in which he kept the roll of his boat's crew, he wrote with a pencil in large, unsteady characters: "Jean Berny died at sea, a month ago," tore out the leaf, folded it once across, and ran and gave it to the sentry: "Give her that, my boy, give her that, quick!" and thereon fled to the depths of the ship, with a great dread on him, as if he had struck her with a knife, and followed by the other four, who no more than he could endure to hear that mother's cry of anguish.

When they returned to the deck a few minutes later a cold, penetrating rain was falling and the wind was blowing. All the small boats, without exception, had either left or were making ready to leave,

their skippers terrified by the squall that had come up so quickly and had such an ugly look about it.

With timid, hesitating steps they approached the gangway to see what had become of the boat that contained Jean Berny's mother—and they recognized it without difficulty, ten yards away on the ship's quarter, just finishing getting up its sail; in the stern sheets, on the flooring, was a human form that one of the boatmen was holding in restraint, because it struggled as if with an intention of casting itself overboard. A piece of coarse sail-cloth had been spread over it, as if it had been a corpse, but the protecting canvas was insufficient to conceal a woman's bedabbled, rain-soaked hat, with a gray feather pitifully sweeping the muddy planks, and a hand, from which the glove had been partially removed, whose fingers were stained with blood. The little Breton sentry, whose face was pale enough now, with a great tear trickling down each

cheek, said to them in explanation ; "It was this way, you see ; she made a grab for the ladder, thinking to climb on board, and the iron bar stripped her finger-nails clean off."

"My God, my God !" said Pierre Joal, in deep, low-toned accents, "my Lord and God ! but that was a sorrowful sight to see, though !" He did not long continue to see the sight, however, for a mist came before his eyes ; he thought of his own mother, and his fortitude abandoned him entirely ; he gave a great gulp and choked back a rising sob, and the tears streamed down his face, mingling with the driving rain that was inundating everything.

LIII

SHE was in her own home, whither she had been conducted or carried by someone unknown to her and laid upon her bed, on which she had remained stretched, for how many hours she could not have told ; wearing still her pretty new dress, now ruined by rain and bilgewater, and on her feet her muddy shoes, that had soiled the immaculate white counterpane. On her wounded hand was a rude dressing that someone had placed there, but she had disarranged it amid the writhings and convulsive movements of her arms and the red drops were oozing forth again.

All through the night she had had spells of heavy stupor, illuminated from within by fitful, incoherent flashes of consciousness, in which images of her dead boy were

ever present, and each time that she aroused from one of those somnolent spells her awaking was more heart breaking in its lucidity, as soon as a few brief seconds had served to banish the illusion that she had been dreaming. The hideous reality, on the contrary, ever continued to assert itself more and more distinctly. In her poor head, that was gradually shaking off the effect produced by the first benumbing blow, the horrible thing was establishing itself as a fact, ever assuming more substantial proportions, that she was to carry with her as long as life endured—

When she awoke this time and opened her eyes after a longer period of somnolency it was daylight. The bright morning sunshine was streaming into the room, impulsive as if life had known no change since yesterday. It must be morning, the beginning of another fugitive day, it mattered not what, a day of spring like all the rest. She awoke with the indifference of a woman dead, for time and for eternity—and for all

things beside. With the horrible impression of irremediable, annihilating disaster, that was slow to define itself clearly, however, in the tardily progressive return of her dazed and wearied consciousness, she looked on surrounding objects and beheld them as from the bottom of a pit, as if she were already laid in her grave. She had ceased to delude herself with the hope that it was all a fantastic, evil dream that would pass away; no, the knowledge of the *reality* of her remediless loss was now impressed indelibly on her mind. Before proceeding further to collect her thoughts, she took note, always with the most perfect indifference and unconcern, of the disorder that reigned among the few poor objects that until now had been guarded with such jealous care. Her bed defiled by the mud off her shoes; the hat with the gray feather, which looked as though it had been dragged through the gutter, thrown negligently on a chair; and on the mantel-shelf the most fondly cherished of her

vases, which she had brought from their old Provençal home, overturned and broken, its flowers scattered on the floor. Then her glance fell on two women who were sitting at her bedside—two women of the neighborhood who had taken turns during the night to watch and restrain her from doing violence on herself—and at last the atrocious thing burst on her memory with more implacable distinctness: Ah, her boy! her boy, her Jean! And raising herself with a violent start to a sitting posture on the bed, as if some spring within her had suddenly given way, rending and lacerating her being, she gave utterance to a succession of appalling shrieks, tearing her forehead with what nails were left to her, compressing her head with both her hands as if she would crush out the horrible anguish that was within. And while she relieved her soul of its burden of misery by that long wailing cry that it froze the blood to hear, the two watchers, women of the people, sat by and looked at each other silently,

through eyes dim with tears, for they, too, were mothers, and an innate sentiment of delicacy restrained them from intruding on her sorrow with unavailing words.

But presently, seized by one of those imperious impulses that often visit those in torment, impulses that prompt to fly, to cast one's self from lofty places, to beat one's head against stone walls, she leaped quickly from her bed, holding with trembling fingers by the white curtains; then the two women also rose, apprehensive of what she might attempt to do. Her face, seen by the broad light of day, had changed and was grown ten years older, ravaged and wasted in a single night by all the fatigue of her life of humble toil, of unfruitful struggle, of vain waiting. Her eyes had in them an ugly and hateful expression that was new to them and that suffering had doubtless summoned from the dark recesses of her soul, and in addition to all that, what with her soiled dress, her disordered hair and the sullen droop

of the lip, she looked like a woman of the people, she had the air of one of those poor creatures who have succumbed to poverty, an air that would have pained her Jean more than all, had he been there to see.

To make an end of it, that seemed the sole thing possible left her to do—throw open a window, hurl herself out, and end the chapter of her life on the cold hard stones below! But even the thought of death brought no sense of satisfaction to her distracted brain; it would be inadequate, would settle nothing to her liking. In the first place her despair, in revolt against the cruel, unseeing God who had done that thing—in revolt, too, against mankind and against all—felt the need of remaining yet a while on earth, to protest and curse her fate. Again, to leave the world like that, a poor, self-slain old woman, whose remains men would come and carry off with sensations of loathing and disgust, would be a slur cast on her

son, would be wanting in the respect due to his memory. Moreover, she being dead, there would be no living creature upon earth to cherish his remembrance; the adored image that she carried in her heart, the only image of him that subsisted, would be destroyed, he would be the more quickly buried in the depths of the dark void—and these considerations, acting on her mind in a confused, ill-defined way, served to restrain her. And yet, what was she to do? Where was she to look to find the courage that should enable her to live on without him in a long and hopeless future?

She dragged herself wearily up and down the chamber, casting herself down in corners and resting her head against the wall.

As she passed the table she unintentionally swept off some of the small objects on it and broke them, and when one of the women who had been there over night interfered and begged her to "be more

reasonable," she returned, and with a soul-harrowing gesture, broke what remained—those things that she prized most, and that she had preserved for years and years with religious care. She felt an unreasoning irritation against that woman, who had no business there and insisted that she should take heed to trifles like those at such a moment, and was inclined to let her know that she cared not for her, or for her preaching, or for anything in the wide world ; that all was void, that nothing existed longer—now that her Jean was dead.

She shed no tears ; it was nearly twenty-four hours since the horrible little piece of white paper had been handed her by that sailor on the *Saône*, and she had not shed a tear. Her features wore an indescribable expression of fixity that was almost sternness, her nose was pinched and thin, a strongly marked vertical furrow occupied the middle of her forehead and extended to the eyes. Her lips and tongue were

hot and dry ; she had a sensation as if her brain had been removed and replaced by a heavy mass of iron, and her temples seemed to be hooped with a tight-constricted band, likewise of iron.

She had moments of comatose unconsciousness, somewhat like the somnolent spells of the previous horror-fraught night ; then would come the terrible awakening, with its irresistible impulse to beat herself about the head and shriek with agony, to disburden herself of those long, hoarse groans that comfort a little while they last.

Thus passed all the morning and almost all the day. She put off the moment of dying, principally because she was watched, and she found the presence of those women irksome, who persisted so obstinately in remaining there. In her more lucid moments her despair continually gained greater strength and depth, penetrating her with its mortal chill to the very marrow of her bones ; each time she evoked a fresh

memory of Jean, each time one of their plans, now dashed to the ground and ruined hopelessly, came to her mind, she felt the grasp of the inexorable hand upon her, tighter, more relentless——

What had her boy done to God, he, her son, her Jean, her handsome Jean, her idol, her sole treasure upon earth ! Never an instant's happiness for him ! Why had childhood and youth been so harsh and unkind to him ? Denied and cast off, or nearly so, by his relatives down yonder, because he had the misfortune to be poor ; then abandoned and forgotten by that Madeleine, by all the world ! And now, to end all, this miserable death, far from his mother—and they had cast him into the sea, like refuse !

Her thoughts reverted constantly to the window that she must open, to the cruel flagstones below that were waiting to receive her body, but each time respect for the memory of her dead boy restrained her from carrying out her purpose—and also an-

other and more trivial consideration that had of late presented itself to her. She called to mind her Jean's attachment for certain small objects of his own, brought from Provence, that he had intrusted to her care, and for other articles of use or ornament in their humble home that were owned by them in common. She thought regretfully of those she had broken but now. As for the others, into what hands would they fall when she should be no more, what profaning touch awaited them? That was a matter that demanded her attention; she would wait for the morrow to give her clearer ideas on the subject. And while thinking of those poor, paltry little things, it seemed to her a moment as if that mass of iron in her head were softening, were on the point of melting, and that the tension of her feelings was about to relax; but no, her eyes remained dry, her bosom was unshaken by a sob; her grief was not yet ripe for tears.

A sudden desire came over her to look

again on the pictures of her boy, all the pictures, taken at different ages, that she had kept together in one collection. She had scarcely given them a thought for the past two months, engrossed as she was with anticipations of their coming meeting, when her eyes were to feast on a Jean who would doubtless be quite unlike him of other days, a full-grown man, handsome as the day, a Jean of twenty-four. She ran to her closet to get the portraits, tossing the objects on the shelves this way and that in her impatient haste. Among them was one that she loved above all the rest, depicting him as a sailor, with his bright boyish smile upon his face ; this photograph was informed with that visible but mysteriously inexplicable something which proceeds from the soul, and that men call *expression* ; a last reflection of his soul that now was wandering in the great realm of night and darkness lingered in that small image, upon which the mother's gaze was bent. And as she gazed, as if avaricious

of her suffering and unwilling to spare herself a single pang, as she held it to her eyes and looked at it more closely, she saw that the paper, now yellow with age, was dotted with minute white specks, the effect of the humid atmosphere of Brest. So, she was not to be allowed even to keep his picture ; that, too, was to be taken from her, like all the rest !

Oh, and the “little hat !” She felt an uncontrollable, frantic impulse that bade her look on it again, and touch it, at once, without delay. Approaching the window, where the light was stronger, she opened with feverish haste the old green bandbox, removed the protecting gauze that enwrapped the precious relic, and there, faded and antiquated, it lay in the pale sunshine of the northern spring, the “little hat” that had been first assumed, down there in bright, warm Provence, to do honor to that luminous Easter festival, now buried in the past with the other swift vanished years. To Jean it had been a symbol of

all that was best and brightest in his happy, petted childhood ; it had served to remind him of the handsome clothes he was given to wear on Sundays in the past, and of all the luxury of other days in his Provençal home—a very modest luxury, it is true, but that the poor child, when he was become a sailor, took pleasure in magnifying in recollection. And the gracious, curly head that once had worn that little hat, with its ribbon of brown velvet, having developed rapidly into a virile head, had been granted barely sufficient time to dream a few dreams that were never to be realized, to experience the delicious trouble of love, and now, the sport and plaything of the billows in the obscure depths of ocean, it was but a nameless nothing, of less account, more neglected and forgotten in the great scheme of infinity than the least of the pebbles on the shore—

The mother turned it over and over in her nerveless, trembling hands, and never had the “little hat” appeared to her so

antiquated and old-fashioned as to-day, such a sorry little object, so like a relic of a dead child. She even detected a spot where moths had eaten the velvet, and here and there were patches of white mold: the beginning of the labor of the infinitely small creatures that in the end are appointed to triumph over all, and that commence by destroying those objects on which we have been so childish as to place our affections.

What was she to do now with the “little hat” that her Jean had so often recommended to her care? To think that, when she was gone, there would be no one in all the world, no living soul who had loved her boy a little, to whom she could leave this souvenir of him. What, then, was she to do? destroy it with her own hands, commit it to the flames? She had not the courage. *Oh, mon Dieu!* what was she to do with it? And the existence of the little brown felt head-covering brought to her distracted brain an additional and more

horrible complication. It was an obstacle that kept her from dying; and yet, even supposing that she were to condemn herself, a poor, forlorn old woman, to drag out a lingering, lonely life in guarding with useless obstinacy the trifles that had been his—what then? There must come an end sometime, and the fate of the loved objects would only be the worse; the dear garments profaned by the touch of strange, mercenary hands, sold to the old-clothes-man and the second-hand dealer—

Oh, the pitiful thought, the “little hat,” the dear little hat of that long-vanished happy Eastertide, being carried away among filthy rags and refuse in the basket of a rag-picker! She pictured the thing in her mind’s eye, and at the suggestion it seemed to her that there was a general breaking up of everything within her; this time the mass of iron that had so oppressed her did actually melt and dissolve away, in her head, in her heart, everywhere throughout her being. Her bosom, shaken at first

by a few convulsive movements, presently began to labor with a quicker and more interrupted motion than in ordinary breathing, and finally she sank into a chair, bowed her head upon the table, and with thick-coming sobs wept the first scalding tears of the childless mother.

But it was only a physical crisis, the equilibrium of life reasserting itself, one of those reactions of the overtaxed nervous system that are generally brought about by the veriest trifles, and that afford a little temporary relief to the afflicted one by substituting one ill for another.

True peace of mind it seemed as if she was never to look for more, never in this life. She was like one condemned to torture, whose punishment consists in remaining bound to a stake or to a cross until death comes to his release, and who has not even the distraction of bodily pain to dull his thoughts while waiting for the last stern agony. Heavy gates of lead had closed before her, shutting out life, as

impenetrable and immovable as the gates of hell. Alone, alone in the world, a childless, hopeless, prayerless old woman, who would some day soon be taken up from the beach, drowned, or from the pavement, a blood-stained corpse—

LIV

BUT about twilight of that second day, as she sat there on her chair, from which she had not stirred, her eyes dry once more, her temples throbbing with fever, her distracted mind incapable of thought—as she sat there, her roving gaze rested on the wall in front of her, where were two images: the Virgin, white in her white veils, with the date of Jean's first communion inscribed below, and a crucifix, Christ's head bowed upon the cross. The women who had watched, seeing her more calm, had left her, and she was alone—as it was appointed she should be from now on till death.

In the deepening shadows a few rays of the dying daylight, at once an illumination and an appeal, lingered on the two sacred images. And as she gazed on them with

her poor haggard eyes, a great wave of tenderness swept o'er her, that this time, however, came from the deepest recesses of her soul ; a feeling of deep peace gradually filled all her being, and tears came to her eyes again, but less salt and bitter than they had been before. Her great revolt was ended ; acting in obedience to a sudden impulse, she rose and swiftly crossed the room, and cast herself upon her knees before the images, with face upraised toward them—and there all her being was dissolved in a sweet ecstasy yet more profound, that caused her tears to flow as from an abundant spring. The celestial promised land appeared to the bereaved mother, with all the pledges and all the radiant allurement of Christian immortality, as it is understood by those of simple faith and as it must be to afford them comfort and consolation : her Jean, her well-beloved and she would meet again up there above ; her Jean, unchanged, in human shape and still a child, still wearing his

bright boyish smile of earth, who would remember their old home in Provence, would remember the "little hat" and the joyous Easter Sundays of the vanished past.

Yes, all was peace once more, and her rebellious feelings were quieted, as fever is subdued by the application of cooling lotions. Between those two souls, the son's and mother's, each issue of the other, some mysterious link that had snapped had been re-connected, and this tie served to give to the soul that remained on earth the illusion of the enduring existence of the soul that had departed.

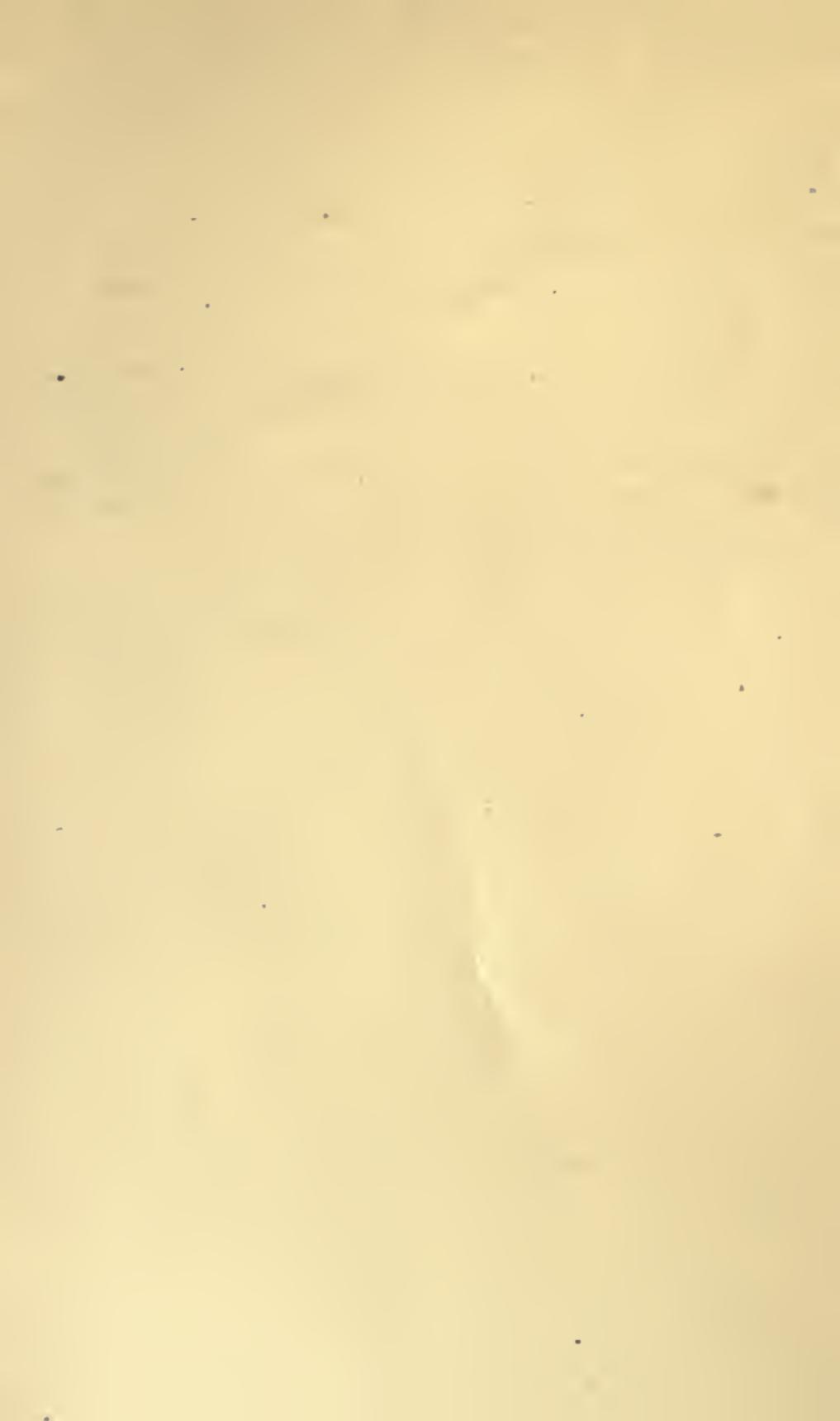
In her present mood of resignation she could see how it might be possible for her to take up the broken thread of her life and spend the remainder of her days in solitude, with her son looking down on her from his remote abode; she had a vision of her little home, once more made neat and orderly, which she would never leave, and of her mourning garments, that she would cause to be fashioned becomingly, of

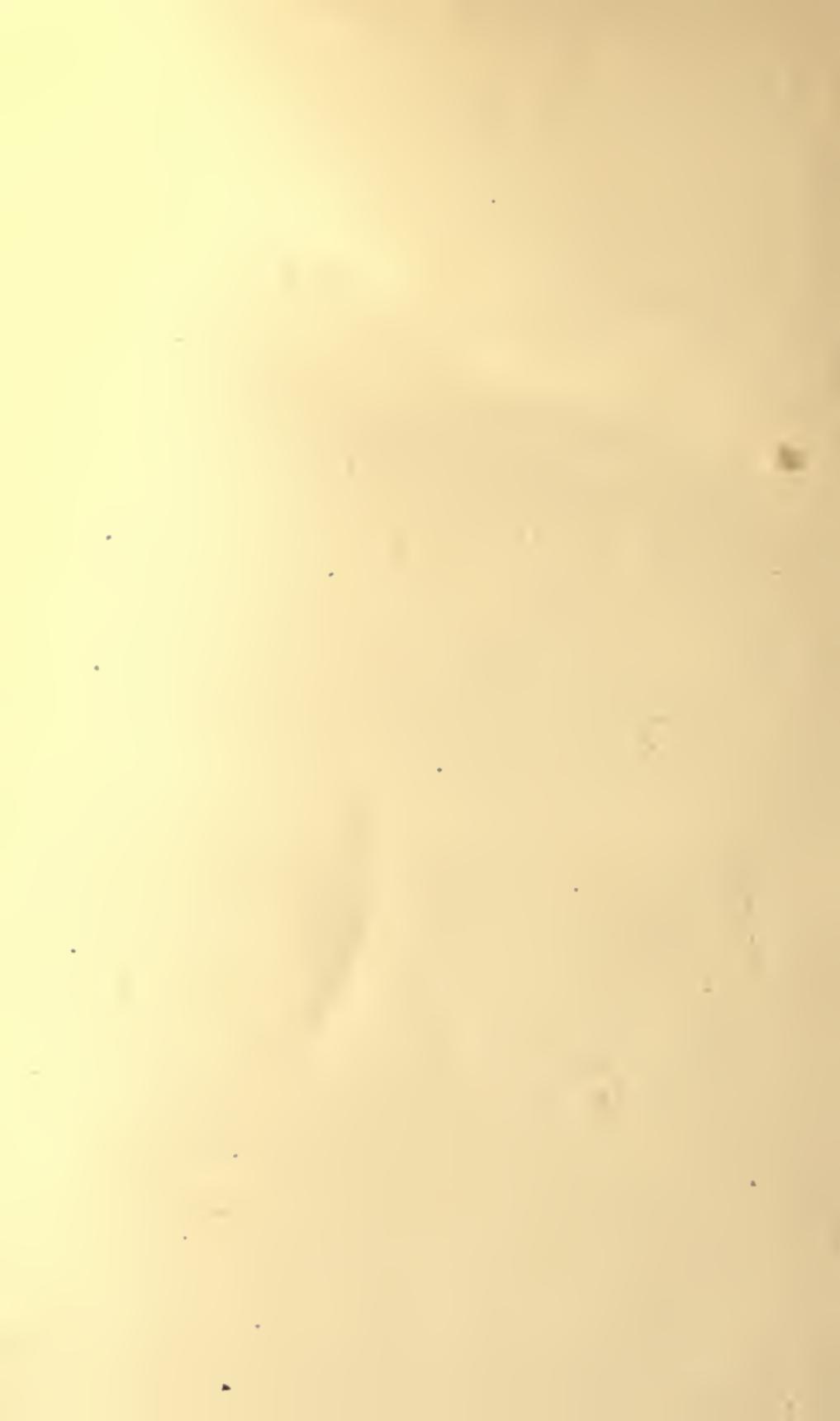
decent stuff and shape, for his sake, from respect to his memory, because he had always wished to see her attired as a lady. And she spoke between her sobs, saying, "Yes, Lord, I will submit to thy will. Yes, Lord, I will live on, I will work, I will do my best—until the time comes when thou shall see fit to take me to thyself."

O Christ of those who weep, O Virgin immaculate and calm, O all ye adorable myths and legends that nothing can replace, that alone sustain the childless mother and the motherless child and give them strength and courage to live on, that make our tears less bitter and bring us hope and cheer in the last dark hour, blessings rest on ye !

And we, whom ye have abandoned for evermore, let us bow our faces in the dust and kiss with tears the traces of your retreating footsteps.

THE END.





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